

**ADULT CHILDREN OF DIVORCE: PATTERNS OF ORGANISATION  
CHARACTERISING COMMITTED RELATIONSHIPS**

by

**CLAIRE NATALIE FULFORD**

submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY**

in the

**DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY**

at the

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**SUPERVISOR: DR A R JOHNSON**

**JUNE 1995**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to thank Dr A.R. Johnson for her consistent enthusiasm and encouragement as a supervisor.

The author wishes to thank family and friends for their consistent support. They know who they are.

The financial assistance of the Centre for Science Development (HSRC, South Africa) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the Centre for Science Development.

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER		Page
	Acknowledgements	ii
	Summary	vi
	Key words	vi
1	INTRODUCTION	1
2	LITERATURE STUDY	5
	Introduction	5
	The outcomes of the divorce experience, for adult children in the context of their committed relationships	6
	The intergenerational transmission of marital instability	15
	Factors contributing to positive and negative outcomes of the divorce experience	17
	The need for an alternative approach	21
3	CONCEPTUAL BASIS	27
	The nature of epistemology	27
	Epistemological presuppositions	31
	There is no 'objective' experience	31
	All meaning is created through language	32
	As we make distinctions we divide the world of experience up into wholes and parts	33

	Relationship	37
	Pattern	38
	Balance	39
	Circular causality	41
	Conclusion - The need for qualitative description	42
4	DESCRIPTIONS AND METADESCRIPTION OF THE ADULT CHILD'S EXPERIENCE OF DIVORCE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF A COMMITTED RELATIONSHIP	46
	Descriptions from Couple 1	
	Description from A	46
	Description from M	47
	• Metadescription founded on the presuppositions expounded by Bateson (1979)	47
	Descriptions from Couple 2	
	Description from N	51
	Description from A	52
	• Metadescription founded on the presuppositions expounded by Bateson (1979)	53
5	CONCLUSIONS	56
	REFERENCES	63

APPENDIX A	67
Written descriptions from Couple 1	
Description from A	67
Description from M	70
Written descriptions from Couple 2	
Description from N	72
Description from A	79

## SUMMARY

This study aims to present an alternative framework with which to view the phenomenon of parental divorce and its perceived consequences for adult children of divorce in committed relationships.

Research done within the traditional Newtonian framework is reviewed and its limitations explicated.

✓ The epistemological presuppositions of the new epistemology are presented along with their implications for conducting research.

— The importance of description as research methodology is emphasised.

Written descriptions from various adult children of divorce are presented. Metadescriptions, by the author, are presented. These metadescriptions, based on the presuppositions of the new epistemology, highlight the value of describing the patterns of organisation which characterise the committed relationships of adult children of divorce.

— It is concluded that an alternative approach, based on the new epistemology, enlarges our understanding of the adult child of divorce within the context of a committed relationship.

## KEY WORDS

Divorce, adult children, Newtonian, epistemology, consequences of divorce, committed relationships, epistemological presuppositions, qualitative description, patterns of organisation, choreography, context, interaction, holism.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Since the second half of this century divorce has become a progressively more common experience. While the divorce rate soared higher in the United States than in other countries, increased rates have been noted in most developed nations (Cooney, 1988).

Growing up divorced has become an alternative developmental path for a substantial number of children world-wide. It has therefore been viewed as increasingly important to consider the impact of parental divorce on the lives of children.

Nearly one child in three experiences parental divorce before attaining majority in the United States (Kalter, 1987). Kanoy and Cunningham (1984) quote Glick who stated that by 1990 approximately a third of the children in America would have experienced parental divorce before they were 18 years of age. Subsequently, each year, in the United States alone, over a million children experience the dissolution of their parents' marriage.

Based on data from the National Survey of Families and Households, a study involving 13 000 respondents, in the USA, it is likely that one-half to two-thirds of first marriages will disrupt (Berman, 1991).

Berman (1991) goes on to say that because people who divorce are also likely to remarry, it is estimated that 30% of children will spend some time in a stepfamily before they reach the age of 18. Since the divorce rate for second marriages is even higher than for first marriages, it is also estimated that one out of every ten children will experience two divorces of the custodial parent before they reach age 16.

There is evidence, too, that divorced parents pass on a higher risk of divorce to their children. Berman (1991, p. 23) goes on to quote Bumpass and Castro who conclude, "About half of today's youth will have spent some time in a one-parent family...When combined with their own chances of marital success, only a minority will have stable two-parent families in both childhood and as an adult."

Following divorce, most children find themselves living in a single-parent, mother-headed family. Despite the public perception that men are taking on greater responsibility in this area, less than 10% of fathers become the custodial parent (Berman, 1991).

Regarding the impact that the experience of parental divorce has on children, Berman (1991) says,

For children, the divorce of their parents never goes away. It may be welcomed. It may be understood. It may be integrated into their lives. It may lead to new strengths. But even when it is a positive solution to a destructive family situation, divorce is a critical experience for its children. Although there may be relief that a painful situation has been ended, there is also regret that a healthy family could not have been created. Divorce is a destroyer of the dream of happily ever after.... It is clear that the divorce of one's parents has lifelong repercussions.... What strikes me, is the vehemence that the men and women with whom I spoke brought to their discussion of parental divorce regardless of the point in time when the divorce occurred or the number of years that have since intervened. "No, I have not gotten over my parents' divorce," I hear from Amy Greene, whose parents separated when she was six years old. "I will never get over it." (pp. 18-19)

Berman (1991) goes on to list the characteristics which men and women perceive as consequences of having grown up with divorced parents. Many of them apparently:

- Berman goes on to list that men and women who grew up with divorced parents tend to be*
- \* have difficulty in trusting others.
  - \* have a fear of commitment.
  - \* have difficulty with intimacy.
  - \* sense themselves as isolated and lonely.
  - \* struggle with problems of self-esteem.
  - \* see their sexuality as a matter of concern.
  - \* feel a strong need to maintain control.
  - \* place a great deal of emphasis on financial security.
  - \* have a strong yearning for stability.
  - \* are highly empathic.



- \* are fiercely independent.
- \* place a high value on being successful. (p. 21)

These points will be further elaborated in the literature study. For now, suffice it to say, that the perspective of divorce as a causal event with either positive or negative outcomes, as illustrated by Berman's (1991) perspective, is characteristic of the approach of most of the research done to date on the long-term consequences of the divorce experience. The perspective provided above is acknowledged as accurate within its contextual domain, that is, from within the confines of Newtonian epistemology, which focuses on the existence of an objective reality where outcomes of experiences can be delineated in terms of direct cause-effect relations.

The aim of the author's study is to provide a fresh and more holistic perspective through providing description of adult children of divorce who are engaged in committed relationships. This will be based in cybernetic epistemology which will be elaborated on in chapter 3. For the purposes of the author's study a committed relationship is defined as one where two individuals of the opposite sex are engaged in an intimate and monogamous relationship, characterised by a firm commitment to each other.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the relevant literature in the field to date. This literature study will essentially be an overview of research conducted within a Newtonian epistemology and will provide the background against which the approach in the author's study will be juxtaposed.

In the literature exposition, in chapter 2, the essential difference between Newtonian epistemology and cybernetic epistemology will be highlighted in terms of certain concepts such as 'holism', 'context' and 'patterns of organisation'. These concepts, which form the conceptual basis of the author, will be further elucidated in chapter 2. For the purposes of the literature study they are defined as follows:

Holism: "The term 'holistic', from the Greek *holos* ('whole'), refers to an understanding of reality in terms of integrated wholes whose properties cannot be reduced to those of smaller units" (Capra, 1982, p. 21). Capra goes on to say that from the standpoint of psychology the properties and

functions of the psyche cannot be comprehended by reducing them to isolated elements.

Context: Bateson (1979) highlights the importance of acknowledging context. Without this acknowledgement there is, according to him, no meaning. Words and actions are essentially given meaning by the context within which they occur. The acknowledgement of contextual circumstances is therefore imperative in order to create meaning and consequently understanding.

Patterns of organisation: From within a holistic approach, where one acknowledges the importance of context, one does not focus on the individual as an isolated entity but rather looks at the patterns of organisation within which an individual participates. Individuals are perceived as being engaged in constant interaction with those around them. These interactions create the context in which individuals are embedded. These interactions in context are characterised by diversity. The diverse nature of interactions gives rise to the formation of patterns which organise relationships. These patterns which organise relationships are essentially what Bateson refers to as choreography (Bateson, 1979).

Chapter 3 consists of an overview of the cybernetic concepts with which the data in the author's study will be presented, as well as a brief exposition of the proposed methodology as founded in cybernetic epistemology.

The fourth chapter will be comprised of qualitative research findings in the form of descriptions from the adult children of divorce, and metadescriptions, provided by the author, based on the conceptual work of Bateson (1979).

The fifth chapter will set out various conclusions.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE STUDY

#### Introduction

It is only in recent years that research has focused on the effects that the experience of a parental divorce has on children. Most of this research, however, deals with children during their childhood years and concentrates on the short-term impact of the divorce experience, that is, on the first two years after the divorce. Negative effects are assumed to dissipate after this time period (Wallerstein, 1987-88).

Very little research has been done on the long-term effects that the divorce experience may or may not have. Consequences of the divorce experience for the adult children of divorce, even though in recent years this area has received more attention, have in the past virtually been ignored in the literature.

The purpose of this literature study is to overview the research which has been done in the area of children of divorce. Emphasis will be on the work that has been done on the long-term consequences of divorce and on the consequences for adult development, particularly as regards the formation of intimate relationships. This study is essentially a critical review which will be juxtaposed with the results of the author's study.

The literature study is divided into four sections. The first section examines a diversity of findings regarding perceived outcomes of the experience of parental divorce within the realm of committed relationships for adult children of divorce. The second section reviews similar findings with regard to a commonly assumed outcome of the divorce experience; the intergenerational transmission of divorce. The third section focuses on research findings which display similarities as regards factors playing a significant role in the outcome of the divorce experience. The fourth section reviews studies which suggest the need for an alternative framework with which to view this phenomenon.

## The Outcomes of the Divorce Experience, for Adult Children, in the Context of their Committed Relationships

The prevailing view in the 1970's was that divorce is a brief crisis which will soon resolve itself. The acute effects of the divorce experience were the major focus of attention. By the 1980's it had been realised that divorce is a much more serious trauma, with long-term effects being evident even though one's life may seem to be on track (Wallerstein, 1987-88).

Divorce, from this traditional Newtonian perspective, is perceived as an objective experience. A dichotomy exists between the individual having the experience and the experience itself, so that the interaction between the individual and the experience is not acknowledged. The experience of divorce is viewed as an objective reality which has certain repercussions for the formation of committed relationships. In other words, it has a direct lineal cause-effect relationship with the formation of an intimate and committed relationship.

In the following exposition, research findings based on these traditional Newtonian epistemological assumptions will be reviewed. In addition, certain characteristics and attitudes of the adult children of divorce, which according to the said researchers are indicative of the nature of committed relationships, will be expounded.

The aim of the author's study, in contrast to this, is to avoid describing the dichotomy between positive and negative outcomes, but rather to construct a holistic picture through the description of the relationships of adult children of divorce. Direct cause-effect relations, in this conceptualisation, are seen as part of a broader pattern of organisation.

Before focusing on providing a holistic picture, however, the literature will be examined in terms of the positive/negative dichotomy.

The best known study of children of divorce, from within this traditional perspective, is by Wallerstein, whose work was conducted over the past 10 to 15 years with her colleagues at the Centre for the Family in Transition in Corte Madera, California. Wallerstein looked at 60 families in a suburban county in the San Francisco Bay area.

Wallerstein's study focuses on the long-term impact that the experience of parental divorce has and warns that divorce not only has a predictable effect on children when it occurs but shadows them into adulthood, intruding on their ability to take charge of their lives (Beal & Hochman, 1991). Even ten years later, according to Wallerstein, "They tell us that growing up is harder for children of divorce every step of the way...they are entering adult heterosexual relationships with the feeling that the deck is stacked against them" (Beal & Hochman, 1991, p.7).

Wallerstein was the first person to provide a dynamic picture of divorce and how it affects men, women and children in the long term (Beal & Hochman, 1991). Wallerstein's study, conducted over the period 1971-1982, aimed to find out what factors influence 'good outcomes', that is, what leads adults and children to turn out reasonably happy and psychologically well-adjusted, and what influences 'bad outcomes', that is, what leads adults to have continuing problems in their relationships and children to suffer continuing low self-esteem and hurt feelings (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989).

According to the author, Wallerstein's initial aim was to establish direct cause-effect relations in terms of what factors contribute to positive outcomes and what factors contribute to negative outcomes of the experience of parental divorce. However, during the course of her ten year follow-up study (Wallerstein, 1987-88; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989), during which she worked with more than 2 000 troubled families, Wallerstein (in Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989) has come to view divorce not as a single circumscribed event, but as a continuum of changing family relationships - as a process that begins during the failing marriage and extends over many years. This would seem to imply that she has moved towards acknowledging the need for focusing on the importance of relationships and context, in other words, towards a more holistic approach.

Wallerstein (in Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989) defines divorce as a relief from an intolerable situation and as an opportunity for a new beginning. She goes on to say that divorce is different for parents and children in that children lose the family structure fundamental to their development. However, children of divorce, like adults of divorce, do, in her view have

second chances - especially in adolescence and later as they enter young adulthood. Wallerstein (in Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989) states that:

they have opportunities to negotiate different and better solutions in their own lives and to reinterpret their earlier experiences in light of new-found maturity. They may re-create the kinds of traumatic relationships that they witnessed in their parents' marriage, or as they consciously or unconsciously dredge up past hurts, they may master long-standing fears of repeating their parents' mistakes. They have a chance to choose better and to resolve the unresolved issues of a childhood that included the trauma of divorce. Sadly, many others fail. (p. 15)

Wallerstein (in Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989) found that one cannot predict the long-term effects of divorce on children based on their reaction at the outset. She describes the post divorce period as a tapestry made of many threads with no one thread accounting for what she has seen. Over the years she observed that themes and patterns shifted with each developmental stage. "A colour that showed little at the outset might later come to dominate the design" (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989, p. 15).

After ten years, however, Wallerstein discovered that although the children of divorce had followed various pathways they share many attitudes, feelings and expectations. Wallerstein says (in Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989),

In various ways, they tell me that they think of themselves as belonging to a special group. They are the children of divorce, even though they have shed their childhood's. It has become a fixed identity and a self-definition that strongly affects their current and future relationships. (p. 22)

The adult children of divorce are further described as having two layers. The surface layer for many, is one of personal success and achievement. These individuals, on the surface, appear capable of shouldering responsibility and in control. The second layer, however, is the wounded child, who is an uncomfortable and unhappy core of anger, perfectionism,

depression, lust, cynicism and excessive control (Beal & Hochman, 1991; Conway, 1990).

The experience of parental divorce, is viewed from within the traditional Newtonian perspective, as having many negative outcomes for the adult children of divorce.

Wallerstein (in Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989) and others (Beal & Hochman, 1991; Berman, 1991; Conway, 1990) have found that the children of divorce share a more conservative morality than their parents. They want a good marriage, commitment, romantic love that lasts, and faithfulness. However, their hopes are shadowed by the sorrowful sense that they are unlikely to achieve their goals of enduring love and marriage. "Their anxiety about not achieving these goals, of being betrayed and rejected in their relationships with the opposite sex, is intense and pervasive" (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989, p. 24). This fear of being betrayed and rejected is related to the characteristics of the adult children of divorce as outlined by Berman (1991). Low self-esteem, Berman says, heads the list. This self-criticism carries over into relationships with other people. The person with low self-esteem holds back, fearing that increased intimacy will result only in more pain from some later, inevitable betrayal.

Mistrustfulness is another trait identified as characteristic of the adult children of divorce. When children learn that a vow can be broken (and divorce writes the end to the marital vow), they face life with uncertainty (Berman, 1991).

Franklin, Janoff-Bulman and Roberts (1990), in a similar vein, found that differences between college-aged children of divorce and college-aged children from intact families may be confined to the narrowest level of children's beliefs about benevolence, trust, and marital optimism. Respondents whose parents had been divorced did not differ from those whose parents were still married on measures of generalised trust; in general, they did not perceive other people or the world as less benevolent. They did differ on several measures of interpersonal trust, but only those specifically related to marriage.

Parental divorce, then, according to Franklin et al. (1990), seems to have a very specific impact on the long-term beliefs and assumptions of children whose parents have been divorced. Although the impact may be considerable and quite broad in the immediate aftermath of the divorce, over time the effect appears to become quite narrow and specifically tied to marital beliefs, the one realm where their experiences have differed from that of peers whose parents are still married.

Many adult children describe parental divorce as something that their mother and father did to them. The need to control, is a response that repeatedly crops up in interview data (Berman, 1991; Conway, 1990). Adult children of divorce, according to Berman, fear commitment and do much to sabotage it when it appears in their lives. They are often instrumental in bringing about the end of the relationships they so eagerly want as they will not allow themselves to enjoy them.

Wallerstein (1987-88) coined the term the 'sleeper effect' in accordance with her observations at the ten year period, that as young women enter young adulthood they display intense anxiety with regards to the attainment of the ideals of love and commitment. Wallerstein believes that the sleeper effect primarily affects young women, in part because girls seem to fare much better psychologically immediately after divorce than boys.

Wallerstein (in Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989) observed that as young men enter adulthood their behaviour is more congruent with their pasts. While many girls seem well adjusted through high school, as they undertake the passage to adulthood and their own first serious relationships, they encounter the sleeper effect. She has not observed a counterpart of the sleeper effect among boys, whose fears seem less pervasive. Sometimes, according to Wallerstein (1991), with the sleeper effect the fear is of betrayal rather than commitment. It occurs at a time when young women are making decisions with long-term implications for their lives. Wallerstein (1987-1988) goes on to say,

Faced with issues of commitment, love and sex in an adult context, they are aware that the game is serious. If they tie in with the wrong man, have children too soon, or choose harmful lifestyles, the effects can be tragic. Overcome by fears and anxieties, they begin to make



connections between these feelings and their parents' divorce.  
(p.110)

The sleeper effect is mentioned here as it has direct bearing on the adult child of divorce with regards to the formation of a committed relationship. For children who experience divorce in their formative years, what they see and experience becomes a part of their inner world, influencing their own relationships 10 and 15 years later, according to Wallerstein (1987-88).

According to the author, Wallerstein's epistemological stance clearly indicates that divorce is an objective experience with pervasive effects. Methodologically, then, she ignores the importance of relational contexts and focuses on describing direct lineal cause-effect sequences that she has observed in her interview data from individuals. She ignores the larger pattern of organisation and focuses on describing individuals.

According to Beal and Hochman (1991), adult children of divorce are attracted to and engage in intimate and committed relationships which are destructive and prohibit growth due to their experience of parental divorce. From a psychodynamic perspective, which essentially focuses on the individual and intrapsychic dynamics, while ignoring relational contexts, they are essentially 'borrowers', that is, they rely on the significant other in their life to fill in the gaps in their own maturity. They essentially use the other person to enhance their own self-esteem. Borrowing, according to Beal and Hochman (1991), has a lot to do with the way people relate to each other and the way they release their anxiety, often having a negative effect on a marriage.

In addition to being perceived as borrowers, Conway (1990) says, adult children of divorce often become involved in 'surface relationships'. They move from one to the other in order to avoid feelings of vulnerability.

Conway's (1990) conclusions, with regard to the outcomes of the experience of parental divorce for the adult children of divorce, represent an extreme focus on the negative relationship between the experience of parental divorce and the ability to successfully engage in an intimate and committed relationship. This is highlighted by Conway's quoting one of his clients who stated that he believed divorce is almost worse than murder

itself. All parties, according to this client, suffer lifelong damaging effects to the emotions and self-esteem at the deepest level.

This is like a slow death from which recovery - if it happens at all - is slow and painful. Only God can undo the damage to my self-image, my feelings of incompetence, my limited social skills, and my inability to trust others. (in Conway, 1990, p. 30)

According to Conway (1990) the losses for adult children of divorce undermine the very foundations of their lives.

From the perspective of the author's study, the above quotation represents an extreme negative reaction which may be accounted for in terms of complex contextual circumstances as opposed to having a single and direct cause-effect relation with the experience of parental divorce.

Glenn and Kramer (1985) found that the adult children of divorce compared unfavourably with other groups on almost all measures of well-being covered by their study. They make a valid observation in saying that if their estimate is correct, that on the average the effects on adult psychological well-being are negative, it does not mean that the effects are negative for all the children of divorce. Severe negative effects on a minority of the individuals could account for their findings and it is also possible that there are important positive effects on some children of divorce. They go on to say that all conclusions on this topic should now be tentative in view of the rather primitive state of the evidence.

Important positive effects of the experience of parental divorce for adult children have been delineated.

Many adult children of divorce characterise themselves as compassionate and understanding (Beal & Hochman, 1991; Berman, 1991; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). Adult children of divorce perceive themselves as able to be trustworthy; a good friend. Relationships are taken seriously even though they are likely to exercise caution in forging them (Berman, 1991).

The attainment of a sense of optimism is characteristic of the adult children of divorce who have successfully come to terms with their experience of parental divorce. They are able to take responsibility for themselves in spite of their past experience (Berman, 1991).

Many women vow that they will carve out separate careers and identities for themselves so that they will not be as vulnerable as their mothers were, should their own marriages fail. Some see this mistrustfulness as a negative carryover of the divorce. Others regard it as a positive legacy, one which they proudly label "independence" (Berman, 1991, p. 59). Independence and ambition, then, are valued outcomes of the divorce experience.

On the positive side, Glenn (1985) cites an empirical study of a large national sample of adults which found that the children of divorce expressed less distrust of people and less alienation than those who grew up in intact families. This finding, he says, suggests that the children of divorce tend to reach adulthood with superior coping skills and consequent high emotional well-being. He goes on to say that similar findings from a few studies with smaller samples of adult children of divorce have led to widespread belief that there is little reason for concern about any enduring negative emotional effects of parental separations.

Wallerstein (in Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989) talks about the psychological tasks for the children of divorce, which, from her perspective, ultimately relate to the ability to successfully engage in the formation of committed relationships. These tasks are: (a) understanding the divorce, (b) strategic withdrawal, (c) dealing with loss, (d) dealing with anger, (e) working out guilt, (f) accepting the permanence of divorce and (g) taking a chance on love. This last task, that is, overcoming the sleeper effect, according to Wallerstein, is built on successfully negotiating all the others and leads to psychological freedom from the past.

The author's study views this task as embedded within relational patterns of organisation. It is not viewed as a task that an individual accomplishes in isolation. Wallerstein (in Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989) defines this task as "being able to venture, not just thinking about it, and not thinking one way and behaving another. It involves accepting a morality that truly guides behaviour" (pp. 293-294).

Wallerstein (1991, p. 354) goes on to say that as findings from the 15-year study have become available, it is apparent that the third decade of life for many of these young people is critical for working out issues of man-woman relationships. A significant number entered psychotherapy, where they worked hard on issues of trying at long last to separate themselves from identification with the mother or the father or their guilt at having attained what a parent failed to achieve.

Wallerstein (1991) acknowledges that psychological configurations discerned at any cross-sectional vantage point inevitably highlight whatever is most salient at that developmental stage and may obscure characteristics that become prominent at a later stage. From this it appears that although Wallerstein's findings are embedded within traditional Newtonian epistemology, she is acknowledging the importance of the contextual nature of findings. The inference that can be made from this is that there is a need both for contextual description and for a move away from assuming direct cause-effect linkages.

In Wallerstein's (1991) review of all the research done to date on the consequences of divorce for children, she notices that no single thread is linked throughout these studies to long-term outcomes whether good or poor. Moreover, factors associated with good outcomes cannot be inferred by simply reversing those linked to poor outcomes. Instead complex and shifting configurations of multiple and interacting factors govern the shadings at each end of the adjustment spectrum. This highlights the complexity of assessing positive and negative outcomes.

The diverse nature of research findings raises a question as to what a more holistic picture of the adult children of divorce in committed relationships might look like. This would include both positive and negative punctuations as part of larger patterns which organise relationships as opposed to dichotomising negative and positive punctuations. Such a picture can be provided by a cybernetic conceptualisation, an exposition of which will be provided in chapter 3.

As indicated in the foregoing exposition of research, which was founded on Newtonian epistemology, the focus has been on direct cause-effect relations, that is, divorce experience leads to fear of betrayal or divorce

leads to commitment to ideals of fidelity. No attention has been directed at describing the nature of the relationships of the adult children of divorce in a holistic and contextual way. In other words, divorce has been perceived as a causal event that has particular repercussions regardless of specific contextual circumstances. It is important to learn what characterises a so-called 'good marriage' in a holistic way. The good and the bad need to be acknowledged as parts of greater patterns, which may, or may not, characterise successful relationships.

The following section provides an overview of research findings connected with one of the most frequently perceived outcomes of the divorce experience from within the traditional Newtonian perspective. This literature will be reviewed in order to expand on the phenomenon of divorce from within the traditional perspective.

### The Intergenerational Transmission of Marital Instability

The intergenerational transmission of divorce refers to the probability that adult children of divorce are more likely to divorce themselves than those who come from intact families. Amato and Booth (1991b), Glenn and Kramer (1987), and Conway (1990) found that there is a tendency for divorce to run in families and that the association between the divorce-proneness of parents and offspring probably is not spurious.

On the issue of the intergenerational transmission of marital instability, Beal and Hochman (1991) maintain that it is not the divorce legacy, but the family patterns leading to the divorce that seep into future generations. The legacy of divorce, though, does seem to be transmitted to daughters more than to sons. Girls, according to Beal and Hochman, feel a different sense of connection with their mothers because they are of the same gender and can feel their pain more exquisitely. They often share with them the feelings that are not picked up as intensely by the boys. Divorce also affects their sense of commitment about future relationships in a more profound and lasting way.

The explanation for this divorce-proneness that seems most promising to Glenn and Kramer (1987) is the 'lower-commitment-to-marriage' explanation. The evidence from clinical studies indicates that the children of divorce tend

to be hesitant and cautious about marriage during adolescence, often saying that they will not marry. However, they are just as likely to marry as are other persons, and they marry at an earlier age on the average. Thus, they seem to be strongly impelled toward marriage while at the same time often feeling highly apprehensive about it. It seems likely, therefore, that when they marry they often hedge their bets against failure by withholding full commitment to the marriage.

Livingstone and Kordinak (1990) review another theory that has been formulated to account for the transmission of marital instability. According to Pope and Mueller this is the 'role-model' rationale proposed from within the confines of social learning theory (in Livingstone & Kordinak, 1990). This role-model rationale, Livingstone and Kordinak go on to say, suggests that children from divorced parents may, in some but not all situations, fail to learn adequate versions for the husband/wife role. This may occur in three ways: the parents' interaction before the divorce may teach inappropriate spousal roles; a role model may be absent after the divorce; or an inappropriate role model provided after the divorce.

The results that Livingstone and Kordinak (1990) quote appear to indicate that parental divorce is associated with less positive attitudes towards marriage and family life. Their research results, although indicating that marriage role expectations are a result of the complex interaction of three variables; sex, religiosity and marital history of family of origin, is still based on a lineal cause-effect approach. Their study is only less simplistic than ones that have focused on a role-model approach, in that it has accounted for an interactional effect. It does not, however, acknowledge the importance of the interaction between the individual and the environment. The focus on variables as causative is indicative of the traditional Newtonian approach.

### Factors contributing to Positive and Negative Outcomes of the Divorce Experience

This section reviews findings which highlight various factors/ circumstances which are influential in determining the outcome of the divorce experience for adult children of divorce.

The importance of acknowledging contextual circumstances and thereby utilising holistic description as a methodology in order to further understand the adult child of divorce, within the context of a committed relationship, is inferred by Wallerstein (in Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989). Although the overall findings are troubling and negative, according to Wallerstein, she does believe that a divorce which is undertaken thoughtfully and realistically can teach children how to confront serious life problems with compassion, wisdom and appropriate action.

Amato and Booth (1991) found that respondents who maintained close relationships with their parents, after divorce, were not markedly different from respondents from very happily intact families. Amato and Booth conclude that their results offer both optimistic and pessimistic outcomes. On the pessimistic side parental divorce seems to have negative consequences in some circumstances. These persist well into adulthood in terms of psychological, social and marital difficulties. On the optimistic side, the long-term consequences of parental divorce can be relatively modest. The divorce experience is also not uniformly problematic for children, with good parental relationships and no experience of subsequent divorces, acting as mediating factors.

Hess and Camara (1979), in a move towards a systems approach, found that the psychological structure of the family after divorce is a mediating factor.

According to Beal and Hochman (1991), the stability, mental health and reasonable behaviour of both parents are major predictors of children's ability to develop satisfying intimate relationships as adults.

The patterns of coping that the adult children of divorce have learned from their parents contribute to what Beal and Hochman (1991) describe as an individual's level of 'behavioural maturity'. This is explained from a psychodynamic point of view, as "...the ability to know the difference between thinking and feeling and to distinguish whether the way you behave is influenced by your thoughts or emotions" (p.140).

It is this ability to distinguish between thinking and feeling within ourselves and between ourselves and others, and learning to use that ability

to direct our lives and solve our problems, that is the central feature of mature growth and development, according to Beal and Hochman (1991). It frees us to move back and forth between intimate emotional closeness with another person and pursuit of our individual dreams and to find pleasure in each. It gives us the objectivity to participate in highly emotional situations because we can exercise logical reasoning when we need to. It allows us to calm anxiety and deal with fairly severe stress without falling apart. It also permits us to hear diverse viewpoints without taking them personally, without automatically reacting and antagonising others (Beal & Hochman, 1991). It appears important, then, to be able to self-reflect, to see oneself as part of a whole system.

For Beal and Hochman (1991), people who are behaviourally mature are those who have become emotionally separate from their family of origin. In Berman's (1991) terms, they have been able to turn away from the model of intimacy provided by their parents. This does not mean that they are estranged or alienated from them. It means that they have taken responsibility for their own behaviour rather than reacting to their parents' anxieties by mimicking or rebelling against their parents' way of dealing with differences.

The roots of maturity, Beal and Hochman (1991) go on to say, are planted firmly in the system of family relations in which all of us play a critical role. Children who grow up in behaviourally mature families are more likely to be behaviourally mature themselves. The relationships of behaviourally immature people are in jeopardy because they do not know how to settle their differences. Their marriages often end in divorce.

People with a lower level of maturity, according to Beal and Hochman (1991), tend to wander in a 'feeling' world. They do not distinguish thinking from feeling, and they cannot tell the difference between fact and opinion. Loving and being loved by others is the focal point of their lives, and often they will be excessive in their attempts to garner love and approval.

Although Beal and Hochman (1991) acknowledge the importance of relationships, family style and interaction, they focus on the individual as objectively influenced by the family. This is essentially a systems approach which does not acknowledge the importance of reciprocal interaction. The



importance of this concept will be illustrated in chapter 3. They do not acknowledge the importance of contextual circumstances and the context of the relationship within which an adult child of divorce may be participating. Instead they focus on the direct cause-effect link between the experience of parental divorce and the outcome for the adult child, as an individual, within the domain of an intimate and committed relationship.

In addition to focusing on the manner in which one's family style of relating affects the outcome of the divorce experience for adult children of divorce within the arena of their intimate relationships, Beal and Hochman (1991) also highlight, from a developmental perspective, the pivotal points in an individual's life where anxieties which may have been long dormant rise to the surface. According to Beal and Hochman (1991), concerns about commitment, fears of abandonment, apprehension about history repeating itself, plague even the most well-adjusted men and women who have lived through the divorce of their parents.

Beal and Hochman (1991) go on to say that it is not surprising that the courtship period, when people are trying to carve out an intimate relationship, should be especially difficult. It is during this time that people struggle to learn about each other, when they come face-to-face with raw emotion, when they are doing more feeling than thinking. Two strangers with different upbringings and different roles within their original families are trying to forge a relationship that will be nurturing and satisfying to both of them.

According to Beal and Hochman (1991), it is then no wonder that patterns from the past poke through. Issues of trust, responsibility, and sensitivity must be confronted. There are decisions to be made and differences to be resolved. How these differences are negotiated determines the course courtship will take.

Beal and Hochman (1991) maintain that when a divorce resolves family conflict, children learn how to move on with their own lives productively. When it does not, they remain stuck, see the divorce as having solved nothing, and learn nothing about how to settle differences. Nagging concerns about their past and future elevate the emotional temperature of the

courtship period for adult children of divorce. It is therefore of no surprise that so many of them seek help at this stage of their lives.

According to Conway (1990), from a psychodynamic perspective of development, children of divorce adopt certain roles in order to protect themselves and the survival of the family unit. These are essentially the responsible one, the hero, the adjuster, the lost child, the placater, the scapegoat, or the mascot.

Conway (1990) says that taking on these roles gives children a sense of reality and identity. It is only after many years, however, that many of these children discover they have been merely playing roles and not living life. Conway further states that whenever an individual plays a role it indicates a problem with trusting people.

Conway (1990) goes on to say that as these children become adults they continue to play unhealthy roles. The role serves the purpose of attempting to control the world and to protect oneself. This essentially alienates the individual from participating in and receiving the benefits from the establishment of an intimate relationship.

From the perspective of the author's study, focusing on roles is akin to the assigning of specific labels. In other words, assigning labels assumes that one will behave in a consistent manner despite a difference in contextual circumstances. Although Conway (1990) acknowledges that the adult child of divorce may assume more than one role or may change roles as the family needs dictate, it is interesting, in terms of the author's study, that individuals may vary their roles across different contexts.

This highlights the need for describing patterns of interaction as opposed to affixing labels. Conway's (1990) perception does not take into account the importance of the interactional relationship between the individual and the environment as contributing to the adoption of particular roles at particular times.

Cooney (1988) comments on the fact that research overlooks the adult child's experience of divorce. She provides qualitative data, from extensive

interviews, which illustrates critical issues that young adults identify in their experience of parental divorce.

Cooney (1988) focuses on the possibility that parental divorce may create family role changes that impinge on young adults' social transitions and personal adjustment. In sum, she says, "...it is the transitional nature of early adulthood that makes the impact of parental divorce a decidedly important issue for social scientists to consider" (p. 807). She later reiterates, "To summarise, parental divorce during young adulthood can be viewed as an unexpected, off-time family transition which may disrupt expected patterns of family roles. Consequently, young adults may be unprepared for the family role changes divorce produces" (p. 813). These changes include loss of emotional support from parents and increased dependency needs from them.

Some of these consequences would impinge on the area of the establishment of intimate relationships. Cooney's (1988) approach differs from that of other researchers in that the importance of context appears to be acknowledged.

### The Need for an Alternative Approach

The inconsistencies characteristic of the research findings to date highlight, from the author's point of view, the need for an alternative approach.

Glenn (1985) says that evidence from large-scale sample surveys may provide some additional insight into the marriages of the children of divorce, but the greatest need now is for in-depth studies, preferably longitudinal, of the children of divorce during early and middle adulthood.

Kelly (1988) states that the divorce literature of the past two decades reflects the diversity of those who have considered the multiple facets of divorce and is uneven in its usefulness. The clinical literature, she goes on to say, has contained reports of children and families who have sought therapy after separation or divorce for difficulties assumed to be related to divorce. Kelly points out that as expected, this literature has emphasised pathology in findings more so than indications of adaptive coping, and has led many

health practitioners to generalise these findings and observations to the larger, normative divorcing population.

Kelly (1988) further says that the resultant intermingling of sound data, unreliable data, clinical observation, social myth, and unsubstantiated or irrelevant theory has created confusion, and strongly voiced opinion, as well as inconsistency in information available to parents, clinicians, schools, lawyers, courts and the media. A prevalent stereotype of the divorcing family, she says, has included the view that daily married and family life pre-separation was characterised by considerable conflict, poor communication, and lack of co-operation. Referring to the relevant literature, she maintains that although this stereotype accurately describes substantial numbers of divorcing families, there is evidence of considerable variation in marriages that end in divorce. In the 1980's the pre-divorce experience of families is heterogeneous, rather than homogeneous, and parents and children begin the divorce process with diverse family histories of marital and parent-child relationships. Such variation may determine the child's own psychological resources and competencies in dealing with the stress of the separation and divorce.

Like Kelly (1988), Kulka and Weingarten (1979) acknowledge the need for eclecticism in research design and strategy and the need for the analysis of patterns of change at the individual level.

According to Hess and Camara (1979), there are two features of most research in the area of children of divorce which limit its relevance. Although these criticisms are directed at research which focuses on children of divorce as opposed to adult children of divorce, they are relevant here.

Firstly, the design of many studies concentrates on differences between groups of children from divorced and non-divorced families, as if they are homogenous entities. The focus is on the consequences of change in the structure of living arrangements and legal status of the group. Results of such studies provide little information about the quality of communication, trust and emotional support that link family members to one another or about how such processes affect children.

A second drawback to many studies of divorce is that they do not include study of the psychological structure of families after divorce as a source of influence on children. Divorce and the absence of one parent are treated as major events that, presumably, account for a variety of outcomes in children. Although the design may include measures of child behaviour long after the divorce has occurred, the possible contribution of post-divorce family relationships to these outcomes is seldom examined.

Hess and Camara (1979) further say, divorce changes the relationship between the parents, it does not end it. Psychological ties continue to connect all family members after the divorce papers have been signed. The patterns of exchange that emerge after marriage dissolution differ greatly from one family to the next. The effect of divorce at any time after separation is a consequence of both the trauma of divorce and the subsequent alterations in the family emotional network.

These post-divorce patterns presumably affect children, but their potential contributions to child outcomes are rarely examined independently of the divorce experience itself. The effects of divorce could be examined in more depth if marital dissolution were viewed as a dramatic, often traumatic event that altered family relationships but did not end them. Such a research strategy would require more attention to family process variables. It would, ideally, also include designs to study families at various stages of development after divorce (Hess & Camara, 1979).

Families differ widely in the way they deal with divorce, but the extent of these differences and their implications for research planning have usually not been taken into account, hence the need for contextual description. Contextual description, as conceptualised by the author, means describing patterns of relationships as opposed to individuals.

Kanoy and Cunningham (1984) state that it is logical that more negative than neutral or positive results were found in studies involving recollections about divorce and responses to divorce. Any stressful event, such as divorce, will probably entail some negative memories, no matter to what extent the divorce was seen as necessary or beneficial. However, it is important to note that many of the children from divorced families expressed attitudes towards their families that were no different from those expressed

by children with married parents, including comments that were positive. When given an opportunity to comment on positive features or when compared with children who have married parents, children with divorced parents may not seem as disturbed as they would otherwise. Once again, this illustrates that how the family responds to the event of legal divorce may be far more important than the event itself.

Placing divorce within an appropriate context may lessen what Kraus called the divorce-as-disaster viewpoint (in Kanoy & Cunningham, 1984). Kanoy and Cunningham go on to say that more researchers are conceptualising divorce as a neutral event with the possibility of positive or negative outcomes. Undoubtedly researchers' views of divorce have been affected by society's view of divorce; divorce does not carry as much stigma as it once did. As researchers' views of divorce change, the methods they use to study divorce may also change.

As more and more children are affected by parental divorce, we will be faced with an undeniable need to provide understanding of this phenomenon. As Brown and Kidwell (in Kanoy & Cunningham, 1984) noted, there are two sides of caring - caring about both what we study and how we study it. The challenge to provide clarity about how and why divorce affects children has never been greater (Kanoy & Cunningham, 1984).

The author, therefore, believes that a holistic approach, which focuses on providing qualitative description, will do much to place the divorce experience in context with regard to the adult child of divorce in his or her relationships and will thereby provide increased understanding of particular contexts at particular times. The idea is not to provide broad generalisations, but to provide descriptions of particular patterns characteristic of certain contexts, within a certain time period. While acknowledging the necessity of punctuating experience in a lineal fashion, that is, in terms of direct cause-effect sequences, in order to render it more comprehensible and accessible, such an epistemological stance gives us a very one sided view of the situations one may encounter when it comes to the adult children of divorce, with particular focus on their intimate relationships.

It is the intention of the author's study to describe a more holistic picture which, in cybernetic terminology, will focus on the organisation of patterns in

the relationships of adult children of divorce. The focus will be on describing particular relationships at a particular point in time as opposed to static cause-effect relations over an extended period of time. It is acknowledged that the negative and positive outcomes described by various researchers are relevant. However, it is the belief of the present author, that we need 'double description' (this concept will be explained in chapter 3), in this complex research area.

We need to attempt to construct holistic description as opposed to describing isolated elements of behaviour. The contradictions apparent in the literature seem to provide support for a fresh approach and a novel perspective in this area.

Wallerstein's (1991) conclusions on the matter seem to support the need for a fresh approach. She says:

It is because of the complexity of the issues that are unfolding that there is cause for concern if there is too single-minded a focus on a single research paradigm, such as much of the current preoccupation with quantitative methods, carefully controlled samples, designated control groups using group-aggregated data, and statistical determination of significance. If these methods were to be adopted to the exclusion of intensive clinical methods and case studies, it might well cost the individual voice of the child. Given not only the complexity of family issues but also the vast numbers of future citizens whose lives will have been profoundly changed by divorce, it is especially important that future research gives weight to the testimony of the inner world of human experience; in this instance to the child's experience. The particular feelings, suffering, and experiences of the child represent the very essence of what needs to be systematically ordered, understood, and addressed at individual, family, and societal levels. (p. 359)

The author's study's focus, however, is on moving beyond the individual voice of the child to the voice of 'relationship'. It is for these reasons that holistic description, focused on particular contexts and their idiosyncratic patterns of organisation, with regard to the committed relationships of the adult children of divorce, is warranted.

- Research, which in the past has focused on 'outcomes', has been useful.
- There appears to be a need, however, for qualitative description which will increase meaning and understanding of individual variation in experience.



## CHAPTER 3

### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter serves to propose an alternative framework with which to describe the phenomenon of divorce and the effects this phenomenon may have on the children of divorce, as adults, within the arena of their intimate relationships. The alternative way of describing/observing this phenomenon is founded in cybernetic epistemology as expounded in the work of Bateson (1979). Within the parameters of an alternative epistemology, the phenomenon of divorce and its repercussions are conceptualised in a different manner from the way they have been conceptualised from within the traditional Newtonian epistemology (Berman, 1991; Conway, 1990; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989).

#### The Nature of Epistemology

Bogdan (1987) quotes Hamlyn's definition of epistemology as "that branch of philosophy concerned with the nature and scope of knowledge, its presuppositions and basis, and the general reliability of claims to knowledge" (p. 27). What we know, and how we perceive and understand the world and our experience in it is very much a function of the presuppositions which underlie the manner in which we go about knowing. Bateson (1979) and Keeney (1983) highlight the importance of epistemology, defined by Keeney as the basic premises which underlie action and cognition. Keeney says that it is only by making these basic premises explicit that we can grasp an understanding of our own processes of cognition and the manner in which we behave.

Making these basic premises explicit, highlights the relationship between one's epistemology, one's research methodology, and the perception and description of research results. In other words, the basic premises which underlie action and cognition (Keeney, 1983) will influence one's choice of research methodology and, further, the manner in which one will perceive and describe research results.

Related to epistemology is Kuhn's (1970) concept of paradigm. Paradigm, here, as Kuhn refers to it, is defined as the entire constellation of

beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community. Paradigm is different from epistemology in that one's paradigm, as defined by Kuhn, may fall within the confines of one's epistemology. In other words, the manner in which one thinks and behaves falls within the confines of the basic premises which underlie the manner in which one thinks and behaves.

Kuhn (1970) traces what he terms "paradigm shifts" (p. 2) through the history of science. Kuhn states that historians of science confront growing difficulties in distinguishing the 'scientific' component of past observation and belief from what their predecessors had readily labelled 'error' and 'superstition'. He goes on to say that the more carefully they study, say, Aristotelian dynamics, the more certain they feel that those once current views of nature were, as a whole, neither less scientific nor more the product of human idiosyncrasy than those current today.

Kuhn (1970) goes on to say,

If those out-of-date beliefs are to be called myths, then myths can be produced by the same sorts of methods and held for the same sorts of reasons that now lead to scientific knowledge. If, on the other hand, they are to be called science, then science has included bodies of belief quite incompatible with the ones we hold today. (1970, pp. 2-3)

Kuhn's (1970) opinion is that the historian must choose the latter of these two alternatives. The historian, according to Kuhn, is to view these out-of-date beliefs as science rather than mythology. This viewpoint encompasses the recognition that what differentiates various schools is not one or another failure of method - they are all 'scientific' but rather their incommensurate ways of seeing the world and of practising science in it.

Kuhn (1970) goes on to talk about scientific revolutions. According to him, they are inaugurated by a growing sense, often restricted to a narrow subdivision of the scientific community, that an existing paradigm has ceased to function adequately in the exploration of an aspect of nature to which that paradigm itself had previously led the way. In both political and scientific development the sense of malfunction which can lead to crisis is prerequisite to revolution.

Once paradigm shifts have taken place, scientists, led by a new paradigm, adopt new instruments and look in new places (Kuhn, 1970).

Although the world does not change with a change of paradigm, the scientist afterward works in a different world. Kuhn concludes by saying that "Scientific knowledge, like language, is intrinsically the common property of a group or else nothing at all. To understand it we shall need to know the special characteristics of the groups that create and use it" (p. 210).

From this one can infer that the manner in which one views science, at any one point in time, is linked to the basic presuppositions which underlie one's manner of knowing and behaving. One's scientific paradigm, in other words, one's constellation of scientific beliefs and techniques, is related to the presuppositions which underlie one's thought and behavioural processes. This relationship highlights the importance of formalising one's epistemology in order to render one's approach to researching various phenomena as comprehensible as possible and in order to sufficiently understand the work of others.

Bateson (1979), in a similar vein, says the following,

Science, like art, religion, commerce, warfare, and even sleep is based on presuppositions. It differs, however, from most other branches of human activity in that not only are the pathways of scientific thought determined by the presuppositions of the scientist but their goals are the testing and revision of old presuppositions and the creation of new. (p. 32)

These presuppositions, essentially comprise one's epistemology. ✓

—The fundamental act of epistemology, according to Keeney (1982), is to draw a distinction - distinguishing an 'it' from the 'background' that is 'not it'.  
 —All that we know, or can know, rests upon the distinctions we draw. Bateson refers to this activity as "punctuation" (Keeney, 1982, p.156). ✕

—Keeney (1983) says that it is impossible for one to not have an epistemology. In other words, it is impossible for one not to adhere to certain basic presuppositions which underlie the way in which one thinks and behaves. Keeney (1983) quotes Bateson who elaborates the point: "You cannot claim to have no epistemology. Those who so claim have nothing but

a bad epistemology" (p. 13). Keeney states that he would prefer to say that the claim to have no epistemology rather reveals an epistemology that does not include a conscious awareness of itself and that this unawareness may be risky.

—According to Bateson (1979), experience of the exterior, that is, the manner in which we punctuate, is always mediated by particular sense organs and neural pathways and to that extent objects are our creation and our experience of them is subjective, not objective. These processes of image perception are inaccessible and unconscious, only the products thereof are conscious.

Bateson (1979) maintains that these two general facts, first that we are ~~unconscious~~ of making the images which we consciously see and, second, that in these unconscious processes, we use a whole range of presuppositions which become built into the finished image, are the ~~beginning~~ of empirical epistemology. The rules of the universe that we think we know, then, are, according to Bateson, deeply buried in our processes of perception. It follows that epistemology at the natural history level is mostly unconscious and correspondingly difficult to change. Bateson continues by ~~saying~~ that in our ignorance of the work of perceptual processes we are free to believe what our senses tell us.

✶ The mostly unconscious nature of epistemology, once again highlights the importance of formalising one's epistemology, through consciously recognising it, in order to develop an awareness of how and why one thinks ~~and~~ behaves the way one does. This process of formalisation will then render action and cognition more accessible to understanding. Certain basic ~~presuppositions~~ need to be articulated in order to facilitate understanding and learning and in order to render action comprehensible and relevant.

Bateson (1979) says that there are certain presuppositions with which every epistemologist must make his or her peace. The manner in which these presuppositions are acknowledged differentiates the traditional 'Newtonian' epistemology from the newer 'ecosystemic' approach, which is ~~based~~ on inter alia cybernetic thinking, and has far reaching implications for the manner in which research is approached and conducted and the way in which its outcomes are described and understood.

The following section will detail these presuppositions, within seven categories, which overlap at times, as they are acknowledged within the context of the author's study. It will be indicated how the manner in which they are acknowledged has far-reaching implications both for the manner in which research is conducted and the assessment of results within the arena of adult children of divorce and their committed relationships.

## Epistemological Presuppositions

### 1. There is No 'Objective' Experience

This presupposition maintains that there is no one fixed, objective reality which we can come to know and understand. To quote Bateson (1979),

Let us say that truth would mean a precise correspondence between our description and what we describe or between our total network of abstractions and deductions and some total understanding of the outside world. Truth in this sense is not obtainable. (p. 34)

Bateson (1979) goes on to say that we can therefore never claim final knowledge of anything. There will always be an infinite number of alternatives not limited by the criterion of simplicity.

This means that the researcher who adheres to the presupposition that ~~there is no objective experience~~, realises that there are no objective outcomes as a result of the experience of parental divorce. There is no ~~objective definition of health or ill-health, of adaptation or maladaptation~~ that she or he should look for with regard to the adult children of divorce.

Since any experience of reality, such as the experience of divorce, is subjective, the experience of parental divorce by any particular individual ~~can be conceptualised as a construction of reality~~. We cannot unilaterally ~~declare that the experience of divorce has objective bad consequences~~ for the adult child of divorce with regard to his or her ability to successfully engage in a committed relationship. On the other hand we cannot say that it has consequences that we can define as objectively good.

Adherents of the traditional Newtonian epistemology (Berman, 1991; Conway, 1990; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989), however, adopt the stance that there is an objective reality. Divorce therefore is part of the 'outside world' or 'reality' and the experience thereof can be described in an objective sense, as either good or bad for the adult child of divorce, within the arena of intimate relationships.

Related to the presupposition that there is no objective experience, is the presupposition, which Bateson (1979) takes from Alfred Korzybski, that the map is not the territory, and the name is not the thing named. In all thought or perception or communication about perception, there is a transformation, a coding between the 'report' and the 'thing reported'.

What we perceive, is a construction of reality, a subjectively created transform. The way in which divorce is perceived, then, is the result of the process of transformation. Communication around the experience of divorce results in the creation of the meaning of divorce for each individual. This means that the process of viewing divorce is a subjectively created experience for the participants involved.

## 2. All Meaning is Created through Language

Language plays a major role in the subjective, arbitrary nature of experience. Language, according to Bateson (1979), commonly stresses only one side of any interaction. Through language we transform reality in order to create explanations. As Bateson says, it is necessary to be quite clear about the universal truth that whatever things may be in their pleromatic and 'thingish' world, they can only enter the world of communication and meaning by their names, their qualities and their attributes (that is, by reports of their internal and external relations and interactions).

It is important to bear in mind the arbitrary nature of language when it comes to understanding the description of research results. From the traditional Newtonian perspective (Berman, 1991; Conway, 1990; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989) the language in which research results are described is perceived as representative of an objective reality. The adherent to the new epistemology realises that the language which she or he uses is a subjective description of a reality that one can never 'objectively'

— know. Language, in this sense, is a social construction, a transformation, which provides us with meaning.

### 3 As We make Distinctions We Divide the World of Experience up into Wholes and Parts

Bateson (1979) says that the division of the perceived universe into parts and wholes is convenient and may be necessary, but no necessity determines how this division should be made. Explanation must always grow out of description, but the description from which it grows will always necessarily contain arbitrary characteristics.

We cannot perceive the whole in its entirety. In other words, the world of experience is too large, complex and diverse, for us to perceive and comprehend it, in its entirety, at any one point in time. Any understanding that we glean with regard to certain phenomena, any co-constructed meanings, are 'arbitrary punctuation's' designed to provide meaning. We must always remember that our punctuation's are 'partial arcs' of a complete recursive whole.

Bateson (1979) introduced the notion of double description to explain how greater understanding could be achieved. The most helpful punctuations, according to Bateson, are those that are devised through double description. — In other words, the combination of diverse viewpoints which provide depth and relevance. Hence, the researcher who acknowledges the value of double description, emphasises the importance of obtaining descriptions of the divorce situation and its perceived repercussions from both partners in the relationship and any relevant others.

The viewpoint of the individual in isolation is a partial punctuation which can only give partial knowledge of the relationship situation. As Keeney (1983, p. 37) says, "When two people interact, each member punctuates the flow of interaction. If an observer combines the views of both individuals, a sense of the whole system will begin to emerge". The traditional Newtonian, in contrast to this, regards the individual's performance on some kind of test or criterion as an objective representation of the divorce experience and its repercussions.

The idea of relationship is further explained by Bateson (1979) as 'moire phenomena' which illustrate three principles:

First, any two patterns may, if appropriately combined, generate a third. Second, any two of these patterns could serve as base for a description of the third. Third, the whole problem of defining what is meant by the word pattern can be approached through these phenomena. (p. 91)

From this exposition it is possible to infer that the adult child of divorce and his or her partner, in an intimate and committed relationship, can be perceived as two patterns, who, in their interaction together, generate a third. Either can provide a description of their relationship and the impact that the experience of parental divorce may have had on it in order to provide understanding of their relationship. However, the combination of description from both partners provides a greater understanding of the third pattern, that is, their relationship.

If one cannot know the whole and if breaking the whole up into parts is arbitrarily done, one can then infer that the manner in which individuals arbitrarily punctuate their experience will be different. The double descriptions that one obtains, from various adult children of divorce in committed relationships, will reveal different punctuations of the divorce experience. This highlights the importance of idiosyncratic experience.

Bateson (1979) points out that divergent sequences are unpredictable and that contrary to the popular image of science, one cannot predict and control. A little more knowledge and a little more know-how will not enable us to predict and control the wild variables. From this one can conclude that the idiosyncratic is all important.

Related to the importance of acknowledging idiosyncratic experience is the concept of context. What enables us to achieve greater understanding of the experience of various individuals is a focus on the context in which they find themselves. According to Bateson (1979),

"context" is linked to another undefined notion called "meaning".

Without context, words and actions have no meaning at all. This is



true not only of human communications in words but also of all communication whatsoever, of all mental process, of all mind, including that which tells the sea anemone how to grow and the amoeba what he should do next. (p. 24)

Bateson (1979) goes on to say that the elephant's trunk

is a "nose" by a process of communication: it is the context of the trunk that identifies it as a nose. That which stands between two eyes and north of a mouth is a "nose", and that is that. It is the context that fixes the meaning. (p. 25)

This point is reiterated later where Bateson (1979) says,

the meaning of a given type of action or sound changes relative to context, and especially relative to the changing state of the relationship between A and B...The whole matter of messages which make some other message intelligible by putting it in context must be considered. (p. 128)

The importance of considering context when it comes to the adult child of divorce within the arena of a committed relationship cannot be ~~overemphasised~~. The context of the relationship and the contexts from which both partners have evolved must be acknowledged. What applies to one situation need not apply to another and what has meaning in one situation or what appears to be the outcome in one situation need not be necessarily so in another situation.

Contextual circumstances must be acknowledged in order for the understanding gleaned within the arena of the divorce experience to be meaningful. The meaning of the experience that is co-constructed between the participants involved has relevance only for that particular context, which those individuals create at that particular time. Bateson (1979) points out ~~that we can know the generic but the specific eludes us~~. "...there is a deep gulf between statements about an identified individual and statements about a class. Such statements are of a different logical type, and prediction from one to the other is always unsure " (p.51).

According to the author, it is therefore not feasible to predict that a particular individual will display characteristics deemed particular to the so-called class of 'adult children of divorce'. The researcher, working from ~~within~~ this framework, knows to avoid making generalisations and focuses on context, pattern, and form. The traditional Newtonian (Berman, 1991; Conway, 1990; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989), on the other hand, believes in the ability to predict and control and does not adequately acknowledge the importance of context.

According to Bateson (1979), however, it is only when describing the behaviour of immense crowds or classes of individuals, through the lenses of Newtonian science, that is, convergent sequences, that we can predict. It is this process that gives science some justification for statistics, providing the statistician always remembers that his or her statements have reference only to aggregates.

Related to the emphasis placed on context, Bateson (1979) talks about the presupposition that nothing will come of nothing. We can only create ~~pattern~~ and generate new meanings when we have information. New information is made from the random. It enables us to explore, change and evolve through learning whereas replication can only occur where DNA is involved.

The researcher, who adheres to the presupposition that nothing will come ~~of~~ nothing, obtains information by noticing how clients punctuate their experience of parental divorce, and then engages in punctuating experience ~~with them in a new way~~. The information generated between the client and the researcher is used to create new meanings and new patterns as opposed to being viewed as representative of an objective reality.

Paradoxically, zero in context (provided by the recipient) also provides us with information through which we can create new orders and patterns. The absence of certain behaviours, thoughts, etcetera, and responses to them provide information as to the nature of the co-evolution in client systems (Bateson, 1979).

## 4 Relationship

Bateson (1979) talks about the difference between number and quantity. Number is exact while quantity is approximate. Modern science, and therefore modern research (Berman, 1991; Conway, 1990; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989) in the area of the experience of parental divorce, focuses on establishing exact numerical relations which are according to Bateson based on invalid presuppositions.

Due to quantity being approximate (Bateson, 1979), the author believes ~~that we cannot predict~~ direct cause-effect relations. As mentioned earlier the ~~researcher~~ cannot unilaterally predict exact outcomes. Responses will be approximate. The adult child in an intimate and committed relationship, who has experienced parental divorce, responds in terms of his or her own collateral energy. Bateson points out that the energy for the response or effect is available in the respondent before the event occurred which triggered it. This is collateral energy.

Bateson (1979) says,

~~Billiard-ball physics~~ proposes that when ball A hits ball B, A gives energy to B, which responds using this energy which A gave it. That is the old syntax and is profoundly, deeply nonsense. Between billiard balls, there is, of course, no "hitting" or "giving" or "responding" or "using". Those words come out of the habit of personifying things and, I suppose, make it easier to go from that nonsense to thingifying people - so that when we speak of the "response" of a living thing to an "external stimulus", we seem to be talking about something like what happens to a billiard ball when it is hit by another. (p. 112)

Bateson (1979) reiterates this point further,

In life and its affairs, there are typically two energetic systems in ~~interdependence~~: One is the system which uses its energy to open or close the faucet or gate or relay; the other is the system whose energy "flows through" the faucet or gate when it is open. (p. 113)

From this we can conclude that the important thing is the interaction; the relationship between the adult child of divorce and his or her partner. The relationship/interaction between the adult child of divorce and his or her parents, and any other significant others is also of crucial importance. When one recognises the relationship, or interaction as context, outcomes will always be probabilistic.

Bateson (1979) further stresses the importance of relationship:

Relationship is not internal to the single person. It is nonsense to talk about "dependency" or "aggressiveness" or "pride" and so on. All such words have their roots in what happens between persons, not in some something-or-other inside a person. No doubt there is a learning in the more particular sense. There are changes in A and changes in B which correspond to the dependency succourance of the relationship. But the relationship comes first; it precedes. (p. 146)

Components of description, then, can be quite various. To attach more validity to one rather than to another way of organising the description would be to indulge illusion. Hence it is imperative when doing research that the researcher realises that his or her perception is not the only one with any validity. What is relevant in one situation, with one client, may not be relevant in another situation. With each client the relationship scenario and interactional components will differ.

The traditional Newtonian (Berman, 1991; Conway, 1990; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989) limits his or her understanding of the divorce experience and its implications for the adult child by focusing on the perceptions of the individual and by under emphasising the importance of relationship.

### § Pattern

Bateson (1979) feels quantity does not determine pattern, but rather the ratio between two quantities establishes the beginning of a pattern. Hence quantity and pattern are of a different logical type and do not readily fit together in the same thinking. The researcher who acknowledges the difference between quantity and pattern focuses on patterns (of parts and wholes) and their organisation, on form and information, on interaction in

context, in order to attain understanding. The move is away from a focus on substance and materiality, away too, from the use of descriptive metaphors of matter, force and energy. The relational system is imperative as opposed to the individual as an isolated quantity. The focus is on understanding qualitative systemic interaction as opposed to isolated individual quantities as is commonplace in the traditional Newtonian epistemology.

According to Bateson (1979), qualitative patterns are latent before the quantity had an impact on it, and when the pattern changes the change is sudden and discontinuous. The researcher who adheres to a belief in the existence of latent qualitative patterns, knows that the experience of parental divorce will be incorporated into the life of the client, within the arena of intimate relationships, in his or her own way. If the experience of divorce is conceptualised as a phenomenon which can be quantitatively measured, as it is in the traditional Newtonian approach, the quantitative experience of divorce will have an impact on the already existing qualitative patterns which will respond in terms of their own organisation.

Bateson (1979) maintains that patterns may be changed or broken by addition, by repetition, by anything that will force you to a new perception of it, and that these changes can never be predicted with absolute certainty because they have not yet happened. The unpredictable nature of these changes would seem to imply that the experience of parental divorce may have many different effects - it need not necessarily have a bad effect or a good effect. The individual situation is all important and holistic description is necessary.

### 6 Balance

Related to the importance of pattern is the presupposition that there are no monotone 'values' in biology. For all objects and experiences there is a quantity that has optimum value. Above that quantity, the variable becomes toxic. To fall below that value is to be deprived (Bateson, 1979).

Bateson (1979) found in his work with the Iatmul tribe on the Sepik River in New Guinea, that various relations among groups and among various types of kin were characterised by interchanges of behaviour. He found that

the more A exhibited a given behaviour, the more B was likely to exhibit the same behaviour. These he called symmetrical interchanges.

Conversely, there were also stylised interchanges in which B's behaviour was different from, but complementary to, that of A. In either case, the relations were potentially subject to progressive escalation, which Bateson (1979) called schismogenesis. He also noted that either symmetrical or complementary schismogenesis could conceivably lead to the breakdown of the system.

Bateson's (1979) observations have implications for the manner in which mental health is perceived. This is related to research in the area of the committed relationships of the adult child of divorce. One's perception of what comprises 'mental health' and adjustment will influence how one will perceive the adult children of divorce within the arena of committed relationships. Recognition of the diverse manner in which people interact leads one to view mental health as a balance of a diversity of behaviours, thoughts and emotions. Healthy relationships are comprised of a balance of varied sequential patterns of interaction, in other words, exchanges of both complementary and symmetrical behaviour.

When viewing the adult child of divorce, who participates in a committed and intimate relationship, in the light of any consequences that the divorce experience may or may not have had, one must examine the diversity of the relationship. A more holistic approach is needed which describes him or her within the context of relationship. To view isolated examples of behaviour, cognition or emotion, as indicative of a poor or a good outcome of the divorce experience, as has been the case from within the traditional Newtonian framework (Berman, 1991; Conway, 1990; Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1989), negates the holistic nature of relationships. Varied sequential patterns, in other words both symmetrical and complementary interactional exchanges, should be the focus of description as opposed to isolating particular pieces of behaviour and describing them as meaningful entities.

The healthy relationship is one characterised by diversity and change in order to remain stable and committed. In other words, both partners are able to adopt a diversity of roles in their relationship with each other.

Consequently, the manner in which individuals choreograph their relationships with each other becomes all important. Various cognitive, emotional and behavioural elements need to be recognised and attended to when viewing the adult child of divorce within the relationship arena.

Related to the unique manner in which each relationship is characterised by diversity, is the presupposition that small is beautiful (Bateson, 1979). For each relationship there is an optimum way of being. The researcher, in each interaction/relationship with each client, must focus on understanding the optimum balance for each individual client system. The researcher who works from this point of view lets the client direct him or her, realising, as mentioned before, the importance of the client's unique situation. One focuses on the information that the client provides, as this highlights the direction for creating understanding and meaning.

### 7 Circular Causality

According to Bateson (1979), logic is a poor model of cause and effect. When the sequences of cause and effect become circular (or more complex than circular), in other words, when sequences of cause and effect become reciprocal and mutually reinforce each other, then the description or mapping of those sequences onto timeless logic becomes self-contradictory. Paradoxes are generated that pure logic cannot tolerate. Bateson goes on to presuppose that causality does not work backward. Lineal thinking, in other words, thinking in terms of direct lineal cause-effect sequences, will always generate either the teleological fallacy (that end determines process) or the myth of some supernatural controlling agency. When causal systems become circular, a change in any part of the circle can be regarded as cause for change, at a later time, in any variable anywhere in the circle.

The researcher who recognises the recursive and reciprocal nature of all interaction realises the importance of himself or herself as part of the client system and recognises how imperative self-referentiality is. She or he does not view himself or herself as an objective observer who is independent from the system she or he examines. She or he recognises the importance of acknowledging the impact that one has on the systems one encounters.

Due to the subjective nature of experience and the reciprocal relationship between client and researcher one can then infer that causality is a matter of arbitrary punctuation subjectively chosen by client and researcher. Any understanding that the researcher and client choose, with regard to the outcome of the experience of parental divorce for the adult child in a committed relationship, is relevant only in so far as it applies to a particular context at a particular time and in so far as other alternatives have not been chosen. Where the adult children of divorce are concerned, then, the perspective of divorce as a causal event with particular repercussions is an arbitrary punctuation. It is a partial arc within a much larger recursive whole and needs to be understood as such.

This focus on arbitrary punctuation highlights the ethical responsibility of the researcher. The researcher is responsible for contributing to the construction of certain realities. There is no such thing as an observer-free description of a situation that can be objectively assessed and evaluated. What one experiences is constructed. In that recursive process, what one knows, leads to a construction and what one constructs, leads to knowing (Keeney, 1982).

Keeney (1982) says, as Wittgenstein informs us, ethics and aesthetics belong to the same domain. What we perceive is drawn by how we behave, and how we behave follows the constraints of what we perceive. It is therefore essential to understand the particular framework and context within which certain meanings are constructed. Much of the research done to date within the field of adult children of divorce and their capacity for intimate and committed relationships has been done within the traditional Newtonian epistemology which focuses on highlighting direct lineal cause-effect sequences and the existence of an objective reality.

### Conclusion - The Need for Qualitative Description

Working from within the premises of the new epistemology enables us to perceive the phenomenon of divorce and its implications for the adult child of divorce in an intimate relationship in an alternative way. No longer can we see it as a single causal event with either good or bad consequences. Each situation will be different. The importance of recognising the subjective



nature of experience, context, relationship and the recursive nature of interaction highlights this.

Viewing the phenomenon of the divorce experience, for the adult child of divorce within a committed relationship, through the lenses of the new epistemology, highlights the need for an alternative approach towards researching this phenomenon. The focus of such research is based on the necessity for description.

Bateson (1979) talks at length about the relationship between "description", "tautology", and "explanation" (pp. 93-96). Pure description, he says, includes all the facts imminent in the phenomena to be described but would indicate no kind of connection among these phenomena that might ~~make~~ them more understandable. On the other hand, an explanation can be total without being descriptive. In science, these two types of organisation of data are connected by what is technically called tautology which is a body of propositions so linked together that the links between the propositions are necessarily valid, that is, if P is true, then P is true. To quote Bateson (1979):

Tautology contains no information whatsoever, and explanation (the mapping of description onto tautology) contains only the information that was present in the description. The "mapping" asserts implicitly that the links which hold the tautology together correspond to relations which obtain in the description. Description, on the other hand, contains information but no logic and no explanation. For some reason, human beings enormously value this combining of ways of organising information or material. (p. 94)

~~Therefore~~, what is often said to be the truth is an arbitrary combination of material from two different sources, that is, description mapped onto tautology in order to provide explanation (a new type of information). ✓

The traditional Newtonian epistemology, however, perceives this mode of organising material as indicative of the truth. These products of perception, ~~which~~ are viewed as the objective truth, are essentially shaped by culture and language. The arbitrary combination of description and tautology results in explanation which is perceived as the truth, as opposed to one version of the truth.

It is therefore imperative to recognise the relative nature of explanation and the importance of context. Doing so, highlights the importance of ~~describing~~ patterns of organisation in the relationships of the adult children of divorce, as opposed to explanation which is arbitrary and may change depending on the context.

Bateson (1979) goes on to say that some regularity in the relation between effect and cause is, of course, assumed. Without that, no mind could possibly guess at cause from effect. But granted such a regularity, we can go on to classify the various sorts of relationship that can be obtained between effect and cause. This classification will later embrace very complex cases when we encounter complex aggregates of information that may be called patterns, action sequences and the like. This recognition of ~~complexity~~ again highlights the need for description as opposed to assuming direct cause-effect relations and explanations.

This need for description is further emphasised when one considers that even greater variety of transformation or coding of experience arises from the fact that the respondent to difference is almost universally energised by collateral energy. There then need be no simple relation between the magnitude of the event or difference which triggers the response and the resulting response (Bateson, 1979).

Bearing in mind that each situation is unique and contextually based, ~~highlights~~ the importance of describing the relationships of the adult children of divorce in terms of the patterns that organise them. We must remember, however, that this type of description can provide us only with an understanding of the experience of parental divorce for the adult children we choose to describe.

~~The~~ self-referentiality of the observer/researcher is also of crucial importance, and must be acknowledged.

~~The~~ following chapter elucidates the importance of double and meta-description in the following way. Extracts from the descriptions of the adult children of divorce will be presented. Extracts are presented as it is ~~acknowledged~~ that there is no objective reality. Experience and explanations ~~thereof~~ are subjectively created through the process of communication. In

this way one realises that all descriptions are valid. One extract, then, is not necessarily more or less valid than another.

Metadescription by the author, based on the epistemology expounded by Bateson (1979), will then be provided. It will become apparent that obtaining descriptions from both partners in a couple, that is, double description, and thereafter providing metadescription, can enhance our understanding of the experience of parental divorce for the adult children of divorce within their committed relationships.

The language utilised in the metadescriptions will create a specific understanding of the phenomenon of divorce as it pertains to the adult child of divorce in his or her committed relationship.

## CHAPTER 4

### DESCRIPTIONS AND METADESCRIPTION OF THE ADULT CHILD'S EXPERIENCE OF DIVORCE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP

#### Descriptions from Couple 1

##### Description from A

"M was caring in ways that made me feel incredibly safe, such as always making sure I was warm enough, not hungry, not tired, etc; - mostly nurturant things - such as you would expect from a mother. I loved that feeling of feeling protected and cared for, while I was at the same time fierce about being independent and not committed to him in any way. Although the two sound mutually exclusive, I've always had to feel both in order to be happy, and I guess M has always allowed me to be or feel both i.e. being dependent on him for "nurturance" while being able to "do my own thing" while he does his" (Appendix A, p. 67).

"He likes to ask me what he should do, what he should wear and what he must remember to do etc" (Appendix A, p. 67).

"We very seldom argue, maybe because we both have a real fear of confrontation and partly because of a great amount of tolerance,..." (Appendix A, p. 67).

"Fear of confrontation certainly comes from living with parents at war and my attempts at being the mediator - something I am very good at today" (Appendix A, p. 68).

"So, for a very long time I thought that I was playing parent in this relationship (often taking a very critical and parental stance) and M was playing the child (often irrational, impulsive, etc)..." (Appendix A, p. 68).

"...even though I was playing parent in reprimanding him about his health etc. It isn't about that, ..." (Appendix A, p. 69).

"As far as I am concerned this is the link I can make between my current relationship and my experience of my parent's divorcing - I have a basic insecurity about those close to me being there (as opposed to absent either physically or otherwise) and need to be reassured of the fact constantly" (Appendix A, p. 69).

"He tends to see things in black and white and makes irrational decisions based on that. Like if he sees me unhappy, he thinks that this is now all his fault and therefore he has to resign. Then in spite of how I am feeling, I "have to" be rational and sensible and tell him that this is not necessary, there is a happy medium etc. etc...and so the pattern continues. I even mediate my own disputes with him when I start to feel that it may lead to major confrontation - this if he hasn't already avoided it by changing the subject or making a joke or simply walked away" (Appendix A, pp. 69-70).

#### Description from M

"A becomes my nurse and doctor. By this I mean that she really looks after me" (Appendix A, p. 70).

"I have never had a bad feeling about leaving A alone or even feeling jealous. I know she feels the same about me. This I feel is due to being honest with each other" (Appendix A, p. 70).

#### Metadescription founded on the Presuppositions expounded by Bateson (1979)

The descriptions provided by A and M are not based on an objective reality. They are transforms of meaning, constructed through language, to explain experience and thereby create a semblance of understanding.

A has constructed a reality which is in essence an arbitrary punctuation of ✓  
a much larger recursive relational whole which we cannot understand as we cannot know the whole at any point in time in its entirety.

A has coded the experience of parental divorce in terms of her collateral energy, which according to Bateson (1979), refers to the presupposition that

the energy for the response was available in the respondent before the event triggered it.

We do not have access to the relational whole in its entirety. Subsequently we only have access to the end result of A's coding processes, which creates explanations of her experiences for her. 'Coding' here refers to the process through which the perceived is transformed into meanings.

As our access is limited to the end result of A's coding processes, that is, the report, we cannot predict with absolute certainty. The experience of parental divorce has not unilaterally created a 'fear of confrontation' and 'feelings of insecurity'. The explanation that it has, is one of many alternatives and is in recursive interaction with A's continued feelings of insecurity and her sequences of interaction with M. This process will now be further explicated.

Consider the following description by A of ongoing interactions between herself and M. "So, for a very long time I thought that I was playing parent in this relationship (often taking a very critical and parental stance) and M was playing the child (often irrational, impulsive, etc)..." (Appendix A, p. 68).

In Batesonian terms 'playing parent' and 'playing child' are only transforms, representing the report and not the thing reported (Bateson, 1979).

~~However~~, constructions about the relationship, such as 'irrational', 'critical', etcetera, seem to be connected to ongoing sequences of behaviour characteristic of the relationship, in a circular manner. A aptly illustrates this point when she says,

He tends to see things in black and white and makes irrational decisions based on that. Like if he sees me unhappy, he thinks that this is now all his fault and therefore he has to resign. Then in spite of how I am feeling, I "have to" be rational and sensible and tell him that this is not necessary. There is a happy medium etc, etc.- and so the pattern continues. I even mediate my own disputes with him when I start to feel that it may lead to major confrontation - this if he hasn't

already avoided it by changing the subject or making a joke or simply walked away. (Appendix A, p. 69)

The circular nature of the interactions between A and M is apparent here. A goes on to describe her 'rational, critical' stance as indicative of her feelings of insecurity.

even though I was playing parent in reprimanding him about his health etc. It isn't about that... As far as I am concerned, this is the link I can make between my current relationship and my experience of my parent's divorcing - I have a basic insecurity about those close to me being there...and need to be reassured of the fact constantly. (Appendix A, p. 69)

The construction of feelings of insecurity as due to the experience of parental divorce by A is relevant now as she currently utilises it to construct the context in which she is embedded. This perception, as was explicated, is in reciprocal interaction with her sequences of interaction with M. However, it must be noted that at another point in time, where contextual circumstances may differ or where alternative contexts may be created, an alternative explanation may be constructed for what A terms feelings of insecurity.

It is important to remember that insecurity and fear of confrontation are not attributes which can be quantitatively measured in individual A as a result of the experience of parental divorce. These meanings, as Bateson (1979) says, have their roots in what happens between persons, not in something-or-other inside a person. Changes in both A and M, in the more particular sense of learning, correspond to the insecurity succourance of their relationship. But it is the relationship that precedes. The relationship, as constructed by A, has interactional sequences which are characterised by insecurity and fear of confrontation.

A goes on to construct her feelings of insecurity (Appendix A) as also due to the fact that M is often away on business. Current circumstances then, are in recursive interaction with behavioural patterns which organise the relationship between A and M. These interactions and the reciprocal construction of meaning around these interactions, create the context in which A and M are embedded.

From the descriptions provided by A and M, it appears that their relationship is organised in such a way that both symmetrical and complementary exchanges occur in this relationship. For instance they both appear to play parent at different times and in different ways to each other. In this way they are at times engaged in complementary exchanges. On the other hand, they appear to organise their patterns of interaction in such a way that they are both able to experience a certain amount of 'independence' and 'freedom' at times, that is, engage in symmetrical exchanges.

It is interesting to note that these symmetrical exchanges are constructed in different ways by A and M. A constructs the behavioural exchanges where freedom and independence are encouraged, as exchanges that she needs in order to feel happy, while M constructs these exchanges as a result of the honesty which he constructs as characterising the relationship. This further points to the subjective nature of the divorce experience for adult children of divorce.

These varied behavioural interactions create a certain sense of balance and pattern in their relationship. As Bateson (1979) says, a diversity of behavioural, emotional and cognitive sequences characterise the 'healthy' relationship. We cannot focus on feelings of insecurity or fear of confrontation as isolated, quantitatively measurable elements particular to an individual. Neither can we focus on these reported feelings and corresponding behaviours as directly related to the experience of parental divorce and as negatively affecting the formation of intimate relationships, without compromising holistic understanding.

It is imperative to remember that we only have access to the end product of the coding process which constructs explanation. The report is not the same as the thing reported. We can never know the thing reported as we can never know the relational whole in its entirety. However, obtaining double description, and further providing metadescription, enhances our understanding of the complexity of the coding process and its reciprocal interactions.



## Descriptions from Couple 2

### Description from N

"My relationship with my husband has developed in large part as a response to my dissatisfaction with my parent's marriage. I decided that if I ever got married I would have to be sure that it was the right person because I was determined not to be trapped in a marriage like that of my parents" (Appendix A, p. 75).

"In some ways we are very similar and in others, complete opposites. It makes life interesting but it can also cause conflict (which, incidentally highlights one of our main differences - he actively seeks it, I avoid it assiduously). I have always found conflict extremely stressful and upsetting, particularly since it was something which was never openly acknowledged or discussed when I lived with my parents,..." (Appendix A, p. 75).

"We are very well matched intellectually and have a similar world-view so we don't generally disagree on matters of religion, morality, politics, etc. but we enjoy debates and discussions of an intellectual nature..." (Appendix A, p. 75).

"I do have a troublesome streak of dependence and passivity which I struggle to overcome" (Appendix A, p. 76).

"For this reason, I have also begun exercising, another thing which I have not been particularly fond of, ...perhaps as a result of an ingrained passivity (created by my upbringing) which tends to make it difficult to be proactive, aggressive and an energetic 'initiator'..." (Appendix A, p. 76).

"My parents did not fight openly, and problems in the family were avoided and denied. This is lethal in a relationship but luckily I am aware of my tendency to avoid conflict and luckily my husband often forces confrontation" (Appendix A, p. 77).

"I think that he has provided me with a role model which compensates for some of the deficiencies of the one with which I grew up" (Appendix A, p. 78).

"Another necessary, or rather absolutely crucial, component is trust. My parent's divorce was eventually precipitated by my father's affair with a younger woman..." (Appendix A, p. 78).

"My trust in people was not great, but A worked very hard for a long time at the beginning of our relationship to prove that I could trust him, since he understood that I needed this" (Appendix A, p. 78).

#### Description from A

"I would characterise my marriage as very good. My relationship with my wife is one of trust and mutual respect" (Appendix A, p. 80).

"In my family, hostility and aggression are openly displayed" (Appendix A, p. 80).

"This constant exposure to and participation in conflict has prepared me for life in the business world and the real world of relationships. I have learned that conflict is not bad but that it is a natural part of a family's life and it is worse to suppress resentment or disagreement than to express it and try to resolve the issue" (Appendix A, p. 80).

"I also believe that my acceptance of conflict as a natural part of a relationship has helped to keep the marriage stable because I see an argument as a healthy and necessary means of communication rather than a reason to get divorced. I feel that my wife is less ready to accept conflict and actively avoids arguments on fundamental issues - I believe this is ultimately unhealthy and I occasionally provoke her in order to make her 'stand up and fight' because I believe that harbouring resentment is much more dangerous than expressing it" (Appendix A, p. 81).

"I was given the choice of where to live and no parental restrictions were placed on me. This enabled me to develop a greater maturity than some of my peers from more 'stable' homes. I was also able to relate to my parents as fellow adults after the divorce rather than a parent-child relationship. This also helped to develop some of the independence and maturity which is so necessary in a marriage" (Appendix A, p. 81).

"My parents' relationship also taught me that the key to keeping a relationship alive is mutual respect and commitment to each other and the relationship" (Appendix A, p. 82).

"If two people keep full and stimulating independent lives then it allows them room to express themselves outside the marriage and allows room for expressing creative urges and frustrations outside of the marriage when the marriage is too brittle. For this reason I have actively encouraged my wife to seek activities/employment outside of the marriage and I try to do the same" (Appendix A, p. 82).

Metadescription founded on the Presuppositions founded by Bateson (1979)

—Both N and A construct their relationship, through language, as one characterised by mutual respect and compatibility. Their relationship with each other is organised in terms of the construction of compatibility in world view with regards to subjects such as politics, religion and morality. This perception of compatibility with regards to these subjects seems to be indicative of symmetrical interaction.

—N constructs her relationship as having developed as a result of the dissatisfaction she felt towards her parents' marriage. This is an arbitrary punctuation which she chooses to focus on within the larger recursive relational whole which we can never know in its entirety.

—Other arbitrary punctuations include her construction of A as trustworthy and as a role model for her. These constructions, according to Bateson (1979), are transforms of meaning, in terms of her collateral energy, which enable her to explain experience. These arbitrary punctuations are in reciprocal interaction with her behavioural sequences with A and thereby the development of further constructions. For example N says "Another necessary, or rather absolutely crucial, component is trust. My parent's divorce was eventually precipitated by my father's affair with a younger woman" (Appendix A, p. 78). Trust, then, was arbitrarily punctuated by N as a necessary component for a relationship. She further goes on to say, "My trust in people was not great, but A worked very hard for a long time at the beginning of our relationship to prove that I could trust him, since he understood that I needed this" (Appendix A, p. 78).

From this quote one can surmise that N entered the relationship with the perception that she needed to trust her partner. This perception was reciprocally reinforced through her behavioural sequences with A where he worked very hard to prove that she could trust him as he understood that she needed this. This behavioural interaction, it appears, would have reinforced N's tendency to trust A and thereby would reinforce her constructions of him as trustworthy. Their perceptions about and accommodation of trust indicate the circular nature of their relationship.

N and A construct their experience of parental divorce differently. The explication of presuppositions pointed out that the contexts in which they were reciprocally embedded, within their families of origin, have organised their perceptions of the divorce experience in idiosyncratic ways. These constructions, which are essentially different, centre around the area of conflict in their relationship and reciprocally impact on their differing behavioural interactions in the arena of conflict within the context of their relationship.

N says:

In some ways we are very similar and in others, complete opposites. It makes life interesting but can also cause conflict (which, incidentally highlights one of our main differences - he actively seeks it, I avoid it assiduously). I have always found conflict extremely stressful and upsetting, particularly since it was something which was never openly acknowledged or discussed when I lived with my parents. (Appendix A, p. 75)

A, on the other hand, says:

This constant exposure to and participation in conflict has prepared me for life in the business world and the real world of relationships. I have learned that conflict is not bad but that it is a natural part of a family's life and it is worse to suppress resentment or disagreement than to express it and try to resolve the issue. (Appendix A, p. 80)

These differing constructions are arbitrarily punctuated as related to the experience of parental divorce. A constructs the experience of conflict in his

family of origin as a positive carryover of the divorce experience, as he believes it is imperative to deal with conflict openly. In contrast, N constructs her experience of conflict as negative. This originates from her construction of conflict as having been avoided in her family of origin.

— Their particular attitudes towards conflict, it must be remembered, are embedded within their patterns of interaction which mutually and reciprocally influence their attitudes and behaviours. These attitudes are parts of the patterns in which they are organised. They are not attitudes inherent to the individual which can be quantitatively measured. They are relevant in creating the context for the relationship as it presently exists. Alternative punctuations are not chosen as they currently are not regarded as feasible in terms of constructing meaning for the relationship.

Both N and A's constructions of meaning around the issue of conflict reciprocally reinforce behavioural sequences of complementarity in that A is constructed, by both partners, as being more 'paternal' in this area. The reasons given are that he actively provokes conflict in order to 'teach' N to 'stand up and fight', while N is constructed as 'passive' and less able to be aggressive or the initiator.

N constructs this passivity and dependence as ingrained due to her upbringing. Her punctuation is one that attributes these qualities to herself. — However, it must be remembered that these qualities are embedded in the patterns of interaction which characterise the relationship. As already explained, these constructions of meaning are in reciprocal interaction with behavioural sequences of interaction.

It is apparent, then, that at different times N and A are engaged in symmetrical exchanges, that is, in areas where they perceive themselves as compatible, and at other times engaged in complementary exchanges, that is, in the area of conflict. These varied exchanges create diverse patterns of interaction and therefore a sense of balance in their relationship.

— The above descriptions provided by the author are the author's arbitrary punctuations. It is imperative to recognise that the author is a part of this recursive whole, and constructs meaning from the descriptions provided in terms of her own collateral energy.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS

In chapter 2, literature was reviewed appertaining to the long-term effects the experience of parental divorce has been perceived to have, with particular emphasis on the repercussions this experience has for the adult child of divorce engaged in an intimate relationship.

This chapter focused on the fact that research to date has characteristically been conducted within the confines of a Newtonian epistemology which posits the existence of an objective reality, independent from the observer. This reality is characterised by lineal events which have direct cause-effect relations. The validity of this perspective was acknowledged within the confines of Newtonian epistemology, because of the necessity of punctuating experience in such a way in order render it comprehensible and accessible. However, it was noted that viewing experience from within this perspective is limited, in that it does not lead to holistic understanding. From this traditional perspective we are only able to glimpse partial arcs within a larger recursive, relational whole which we can never comprehend in its entirety.

Chapter 3 presented an exposition of the nature of epistemology and the presuppositions on which the new epistemology is founded as conceptualised by Bateson (1979). The implications of these presuppositions for the manner in which research is conducted were explicated and the importance of eliciting multiple and detailed descriptions was highlighted.

In chapter 4, extracts from various descriptions provided by adult children of divorce were presented along with metadescriptions provided by the author. This exercise is an attempt to illustrate the value of applying the new epistemology through utilising various descriptions in order to enhance understanding of the phenomenon of the adult child of divorce within an intimate relationship.

The author has drawn distinctions upon distinctions, that is, she has provided a metadescription of the descriptions obtained from the

participants, based on the new epistemology. This metadescription is based on the presuppositions which underlie the new epistemology. Viewing the adult child of divorce within the context of an intimate relationship through the lenses of the new epistemology enlarges our understanding of this phenomenon.

For example A, in Couple 1, explains her behaviour and feelings of insecurity as connected to what M does, but still links these feelings to the experience of parental divorce. Utilising the presuppositions of the new epistemology as a window to describing her description leads to the recursive nature of the couple's behavioural interactions and her feelings becoming evident. The recursive nature of her descriptions and her experience of the relationship also become evident.

2. As opposed to focusing on the individual descriptions provided by the adult children of divorce as whole and complete, the author has provided description from another level of organisation, that is, naming the pattern that choreographs the interactions of the couple. This description creates a sense of the patterns which characterise the relationships of the adult children of divorce, in the present study.

Obtaining descriptions from both partners within a relationship and thereafter combining these descriptions through the eyes of the author, in the language of the new epistemology, enables one to construct a sense of how relationships are organised in terms of pattern, balance and circular causality. For example, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Couple 1's relationship, at times, can be described in terms of interactional patterns which are characterised by insecurity. The behavioural interactions characterised by A's rational and critical stance and M's irrational and impulsive stance are in a circular and reciprocal relationship with feelings of insecurity. However, viewing other patterns of interaction in the relationship, such as those characterised by independence and freedom, along with the patterns characterised by insecurity, according to Bateson (1979), creates a sense of balance in the relationship.

As Keeney (1983) says, when one combines various descriptions, a sense of the whole system will then emerge. This creates a more holistic understanding of the divorce phenomenon within the context of the adult

— child's intimate relationship because the inference of direct cause-effect relations, as complete entities, becomes questionable. These explanations are only resourceful in so far as they are arbitrary punctuations, partial arcs of a greater recursive, relational whole.

The attributes which are said, from the traditional Newtonian perspective, to be quantitatively measurable, and to characterise the individual adult child of divorce, and which are seen to be in a direct cause-effect relationship with the experience of parental divorce, in Batesonian language are seen as arbitrary punctuations in complex circuits of interaction within which a relationship is organised. These attributes, as mentioned in chapter 3, belong to the relationship. It is important, then, to focus on the patterns of interaction in the relationship which embody reciprocal interaction with particular feelings, behaviours and thoughts. Doing so enlarges our understanding of the phenomenon as one is able to see how the one-sided single description operates within larger patterns. It is therefore imperative to look at the 'patterns which connect' (Bateson, 1979), as opposed to isolated entities.

The context which the participants create and in which they are embedded, must be examined as closely as possible in order to elicit meaning and thereby create understanding of diversity in experience. As Bateson (1979) reiterates, it is the context that creates the meaning. For example, the context within which the meaning of insecurity must be examined, in Couple 1's case, is their relationship and not only the experience of parental divorce.

It can be argued that insecurity becomes the context within which the pattern of the relationship, in Couple 1's case, becomes embedded. For Couple 2, conflict should be examined as a contextual marker and not only with reference to the divorce related meaning thereof. As described in chapter 4, conflict in this couple's case seems to provide an understanding of the pattern that orders their sequences of behaviour.

Exploring the context through obtaining detailed description and thereby isolating patterns of organisation which characterise the intimate relationships of the adult children of divorce (such as the pattern ordered by insecurity in Couple 1's case, and the pattern ordered by conflict in Couple



2's case) is imperative in order to enhance understanding of the divorce phenomenon. An attempt was made to do this in chapter 3.

The exercise in chapter 3 attempted to illustrate that the experience of parental divorce, per se, is not unilaterally and directly related to quantitatively measurable attributes of individuals, such as insecurity, which then unilaterally affect the formation of intimate relationships in any one particular manner.

As Bateson (1979) said, statistical statements and generalisations are only useful when one is talking about aggregates.

As mentioned in chapter 2, Bateson (1979) develops this thought by saying that some regularity between effect and cause is, of course, assumed. But when one goes on to classify the various sorts of relationship which can emerge, this classification will later become complexified as patterns become prominent. Consequently the original assumed relationship will lose its validity as a holistic explanation. Direct cause-effect propositions, then, become unfeasible as whole explanations.

In addition to this, Bateson (1979) reiterates that the respondent is energised by collateral energy which further negates the positing of a simple and direct relationship between the event (in this case the experience of parental divorce) which triggers the response and the resulting response.

Traditionally, research has focused on single descriptions from the adult children of divorce obtained through the utilisation of questionnaires, interviews, and various forms of test results. Responses to these have been assumed to be representative of an objective reality. In this case an objective indication of the repercussions of the experience of parental divorce for the adult child engaged in an intimate relationship. The importance of relationship, and its complexities, has not been recognised.

From within the perspective of the new epistemology, and its application in chapter 4, it can be inferred that these single descriptions are arbitrary punctuations which only provide us with partial understanding of the experience of parental divorce for the adult child in an intimate relationship.

When one obtains double description and constructs metadescription, it can

be seen, as was indicated in chapter 4, that these single descriptions, such as the description of insecurity, are embedded within larger patterns of organisation.

—In addition to this, when one considers that meanings (arbitrary punctuations) are transforms of experience, constructed through language in order to create understanding, and that they are not based on an objective, observer independent reality, the phenomenon we are viewing becomes complexified.

—Meanings which may have value at one particular point in time may not be valid at another. As was mentioned in chapter 3 and illustrated in chapter 4, the construction of meanings are in constant reciprocal interaction with the behavioural sequences which characterise a relationship. The construction, then, of an alternative meaning would reciprocally interact with the behavioural patterns characteristic of the relationship.

For example, the individuals in Couple 2 construct conflict as related to their experiences of parental divorce in different ways. A constructs conflict as necessary and productive, while N perceives it as negative. These perceptions are in reciprocal interaction, with A actively pursuing conflict and N assiduously avoiding it.

Over time, the meanings constructed around the area of conflict may alter. For example, conflict could be co-constructed as an area in which A and N display their caring for each other in different ways. That is, A pursues it due to a need to be parent to N, while N avoids it as she needs to feel a child to A and needs to allow him to feel parent. This alternative meaning may reciprocally create alternative behavioural interactions within the arena of conflict. N and A may be tempted to develop alternative ways of being parent and child in their interactions. This would have implications for conducting therapy with the adult child of divorce who perceives the experience as having had a unilateral and direct impact on his or her life within the arena of his or her intimate relationship.

Keeney (1992) utilises the concepts expounded by Bateson (1979) to create a systemic model for therapy. He particularly focuses on the importance of eliciting multiple views, the circular nature of interaction and

on the presupposition that there is no objective experience and that consequently meanings are arbitrarily created. His model of therapy would be relevant here.

In conclusion, then, it is apparent that although research conducted within the confines of Newtonian epistemology is relevant, it does not provide one with holistic understanding. Viewing the phenomenon of parental divorce through the lenses of the new epistemology, and focusing on relationship as opposed to the individual entity enlarges our understanding of the individuals with which we are concerned. Elucidating the various patterns which characterise a relationship complexifies the phenomenon we are observing. It then becomes difficult to state that the experience of parental divorce has a direct good or a direct bad effect for the adult child of divorce engaged in an intimate relationship.

The relationship and the manner in which it is organised is primary. Diverse sequences of behavioural interaction highlight the importance of focusing on the relationship. Elements of behaviour, cognition or emotion may be expressed in different ways at different times and cannot be viewed as isolated entities which unilaterally affect the whole relationship within which an adult child of divorce is engaged.

These elements, which are assumed to be quantitatively measurable, are parts of greater patterns. It is the patterns that need to be observed in order to create a description of how the adult child of divorce interacts in his or her relationship. Once one creates a sense of the pattern and the balance characterising the relationship, only then can one, as an observer, arbitrarily punctuate the relationship as either good or bad.

All events, as mentioned in chapter 2, are part of a reciprocal process of circular causality. Current circumstances, or others, such as context created in family of origin, may be relevant in terms of being 'arbitrary causes' which may affect any other part of the circle. That is, there is a recursive relationship between one's experiences, on the one hand, and one's explanations thereof, on the other hand. This was made evident when A in Couple 1 linked M's being away on business trips to her feelings of insecurity.

The value of obtaining description and providing metadescription thus becomes apparent. This process enables us to move away from viewing the adult child of divorce as a 'victim' of the circumstance of parental divorce, within the context of his or her intimate relationship. It also allows us to move away from conceptualising the experience of parental divorce as an objective entity with objective effects capable of being isolated by an independent observer. Focusing on the description of relationship highlights the complexity of the divorce phenomenon, for the adult child of divorce, and increases understanding of variation and idiosyncrasy in experience. This point is crucial, since, as was illustrated in chapter 4, description or explanation of experience is recursively linked to experience itself. A broader, and more complex understanding of relationships can be achieved through the comparison and combination of multiple descriptions.


It is imperative to recognise that the observer, from the perspective of the new epistemology, is not independent. She or he is reciprocally involved with the constructions she or he arbitrarily punctuates. The author of this study recognises herself as such.

## REFERENCES

- Amato, P.R., & Booth, A. (1991a). The consequences of divorce for attitudes towards divorce and gender roles. Journal of Family Issues, 12(3), 306-322.
- Amato, P.R., & Booth, A. (1991b). Consequences of parental divorce and marital unhappiness for adult well-being. Social Forces, 69(3), 895-914.
- Atkinson, B.J., & Heath, A.W. (1987). Beyond objectivism and relativism: Implications for family research. Journal of Strategic and Systemic Therapies, 6(1), 8-17.
- Bateson, G. (1979). Mind and nature: A necessary unity. New York: Dutton.
- Bateson, G. & Brown, J. (1975). Caring and Clarity. Co-evolution Quarterly, 7, 32-47.
- Beal, E.W. (1979). Children of divorce: A family systems perspective. Journal of Social Issues, 35(4), 140-154.
- Beal, E.W., & Hochman, G. (1991). Adult children of divorce. Breaking the cycle and finding fulfilment in love, marriage and family. New York: Delacarte.
- Berman, C. (1991). A hole in my heart. Adult children of divorce speak out. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Bogdan, J. (1987). "Epistemology" as a semantic pollutant. Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, 13(1), 27-35.
- Bonkowski, S.E. (1989). Lingering sadness: Young adults response to parental divorce. Social casework. The Journal of Contemporary Social Work, 70, 219-223.
- Buckley, W. (Eds.) (1976). Modern systems research for the behavioural scientist. Chicago: Aldine.

- Capra, F. (1983). The turning point. Flamingo: London.
- Conway, J. (1990). Adult children of legal or emotional divorce. Healing your long-term hurt. Illinois: Intervarsity Press.
- Cooney, T.M. (1988). Young adults and parental divorce: Exploring important issues. Human Relations, 41(11), 805-822.
- Cooney, T.M., Smyer, M.A., Hagestad, G.O., & Klock, R. (1986). Parental divorce in young adulthood: Some preliminary findings. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 56, 470-477.
- Franklin, K.M., Janoff-Bulman, R., & Roberts, J.E. (1990). Long-term impact of parental divorce on optimism and trust: Changes in general assumptions or narrow beliefs? Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 59(4), 743-755.
- Glenn, N.D. (1985). Children of divorce. Psychology Today, 19(6), 68-69.
- Glenn, N.D., & Kramer, K.B. (1985). The psychological well-being of adult children of divorce. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 47(4), 905-912.
- Glenn, N.D., & Kramer, K.B. (1987). The marriages and divorces of the children of divorce. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 49(4), 811-825.
- Hess, R.D., & Camara, K.A. (1979). Post-divorce family relationships as mediating factors in the consequences of divorce for children. Journal of Social Issues, 35(4), 79-96.

- Kalter, N. (1987). Long-term effects of divorce on children: A developmental vulnerability model. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 57(4), 587-600.
- Kanoy, K.W., & Cunningham, J.L. (1984). Consensus or confusion in research on children and divorce: Conceptual and methodological issues. Journal of Divorce, 7(4), 45-71.
- Keeney, B. (1982). What is an epistemology of family therapy? Family Process, 21, 153-168.
- Keeney, B. (1983). Aesthetics of change. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Keeney, B. (1992). Mind and therapy. University of South Africa: Sigma Press Pretoria.
- Kelly, J.B. (1988). Longer-term adjustment in children of divorce: Converging findings and implications for practice. Journal of Family Psychology, 2(2), 119-140.
- Kuhn, T.S. (1970). The structure of scientific revolutions. (2nd ed). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kulka, R.A., & Weingarten, H. (1979). The long-term effects of parental divorce in childhood on adult adjustment. Journal of Social Issues, 35(4), 50-78.
- Kurdek, L.A., Blisk, D., & Siesky, A.E. (1981). Correlates of children's long-term adjustment to their parents divorce. Developmental Psychology, 17(5), 565-579.
- Lincoln, E.G., & Guba, Y.S. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. Beverley Hills: Sage.
- Livingstone, R.B., & Kordinak, S.T. (1990). The long-term effects of parental divorce: Marital role expectations. Journal of Divorce and Remarriage, 14(2), 91-105.

- Martin, M., & Martin, D. (1983). Counselling the child of divorce: Emphasising the positive aspects. *Individual Psychology. The Journal of Adlerian Theory, Research and Practice*, 39(2), 180-188.
- Wallerstein, J.S. (1985). Children of divorce. Emerging trends. *Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 8(4), 837-855.
- Wallerstein, J.S. (1987-1988). Children after divorce. Wounds that don't heal. *Perspectives in Psychiatric Care*, 23(3-4), 107-113.
- Wallerstein, J.S. (1991). The long-term effects of divorce on children: A review. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 30(3), 349-360.
- Wallerstein, J., & Blakeslee, S. (1989). Second chances. New York: Ticknor & Fields. 



## WRITTEN DESCRIPTIONS FROM COUPLE 1

## Description from A

I met M 8 years ago as I was coming out of another bad relationship. M was kind and friendly and himself just going through a divorce. We therefore both needed someone who was understanding and gentle. Initially we really were only good friends. We worked together, and spoke mostly at work, while going out to movies together once in a while. Speaking for myself, I felt extremely relaxed with M. I never felt as if I was expected to be someone that I am not, or that certain things about me irked him etc. M was caring in ways that made me feel incredibly safe, such as always making sure I was warm enough, not hungry, not tired, etc... - mostly nurturant things - such as you would expect from a mother. I loved that feeling of feeling protected and cared for, while I was at the same time fierce about being independent and not committed to him in any way. Although the two sound mutually exclusive, I've always had to feel both in order to be happy, and I guess M has always allowed me to be or feel both i.e. being dependent on him for "nurturance" while being able to "do my own thing" while he does his.

This is how it started out, and is still basically the case. I need M around to feel that I belong, in order to say that I function very independently from him and that we have this great relationship in which we each go our own ways if and when we want to without being possessive of or jealous of the other. I think for M I represent someone who he turns to for "rational parenting" as he is the eternal child - playful, irrational, impulsive - although he is 11 years older than me. He likes to ask me what he should do, what he should wear and what he must remember to do etc. In this sense we have so often been described as being "completely opposite", yet these same people regard it as a kind of an ideal relationship. By my own definition I also regard it as a good relationship because of the amount of acceptance of difference. We very seldom argue, maybe because we both have a real fear of confrontation and partly because of a great amount of tolerance, I think even more on the part of M than me. I can be very moody and irritable at times and M handles this with humour and childlike charm which most of the time is very disarming and endearing. Of course there are times when I just push it too far, or when he himself feels hassled and irritable, in which case we battle it

out for a while until we both realise how stupid it actually is. Fear of confrontation certainly comes from living with parents at war and my attempts at being the mediator - something I am very good at today.

My own parents had a fairly loveless marriage, and got divorced when I was 15. They attempted a separation when I was younger (6) but decided to stay together "for the sake of the children". At that time I remember feeling very relieved about this, because I couldn't conceive of a world without both parents, and for years after that I feared that they would leave each other again, although I was equally aware of the constant tension in the house. At the time that they did decide to get divorced I was however ready for it, and it came as a relief. I think this was partly because I was a teenager and was acutely embarrassed about our home life which was very strained. My father was never very friendly to my male friends and overly friendly to my girlfriends (in his way trying to be nice) and my mother was always depressed and as a result irritable and easily frustrated. I never really felt very close to my father although he seemed to adore me. All in all my experience of the time before they got divorced was that it was a strained and very depressing environment from which I had to flee most of the time. I was very close to my mother, but it was very hard to be with her because of what she was going through. I think now that I took it upon myself to make things better/easier/lighter for her and as a result became a bit of a "Pollyanna". The relief probably stemmed from thinking that this would no longer be necessary although she remained depressed for years afterwards, which is probably why I chose to leave for Cape Town shortly after I wrote my matric exams. I desperately wanted to be on my own and to be an "adult", unconsciously thinking that this would free me from childhood experiences and the tasks I took upon myself as the eldest child. In Cape Town I fiercely strove for independence and living the adult life. This is where I also met M a year later. In turn, M strives desperately to remain young and hates any reference to his age.

So, for a very long time I thought that I was playing parent in this relationship (often taking a very critical and parental stance) and M was playing the child (often irrational, impulsive, etc.) and I thought that was how we each satisfied our unconscious needs - me needing to feel grown up in order to get away from childhood experiences, and him needing to feel young and in need of parenting which he lacks in his background. And, in a way this is

true, but only constitutes one half of the interaction. Only very recently have I begun to discover that this is not the only way it works. M has started a job where he is away from home for long hours and I hardly get to see him. Generally I wouldn't mind being on my own from time to time and even enjoy such occasions, yet somehow this became too much for me and I began nagging him about what the long hours are doing to his yuppie flu etc. but feeling more and more frustrated and despairing about the situation. Until I eventually realised that even though I was playing parent in reprimanding him about his health etc. it isn't about that, and the reason why this whole situation is making me so depressed is because he just isn't around for me, and that I need him to be. This whole awareness makes me feel childlike, insecure and not at all "adult" - which of course is nonsense. As far as I am concerned this is the link I can make between my current relationship and my experience of my parents divorcing - I have a basic insecurity about those close to me being there (as opposed to absent either physically or otherwise) and need to be reassured of the fact constantly. The emotional issues that affect this relationship have to do with things I must have felt long ago but have tried so desperately to suppress and run away from by being highly rational, critical, "adult" etc. whereas what I am now faced with is emotionality, basic hurt, sadness, frustration and anger and insecurity and it is all very uncomfortable and confusing.

As far as my parents' marriage is concerned, I am pretty sure that I will avoid the same mistakes my mother made, and in most ways I already have. I don't have an issue with that. Even with my own current "emotional instability" triggered by slight changes in the relationship, I am very sure that the relationship can endure this, and that we will be together for a long time to come. I think that this has to do with the said tolerance for difference and flexibility we have in this relationship which was certainly missing in my parents.

Things I find more difficult with M is that he doesn't really like to talk about the relationship or about emotional things. He tends to see things in black and white and makes irrational decisions based on that. Like if he sees me unhappy, he thinks that this is now all his fault and therefore he has to resign. Then in spite of how I am feeling, I "have to" be rational and sensible and tell him that this is not necessary, there is a happy medium etc. etc.....and so the pattern continues. I even mediate my own disputes with

him when I start to feel that it may lead to major confrontation - this if he hasn't already avoided it by changing the subject or making a joke or simply walked away.

I love being with M and doing things with him. He makes me laugh while he is at the same time very capable with practical and domestic things and in that way is like a mother for me as he cooks, washes dishes, feeds the dog etc. and I love leaving these things to him. My father would never do that for my mother. I think that is how I like to 'prove' that my "marriage" is different from my parent's - pointing out practical everyday ways in which M shows caring and kindness, which they never really had. I don't think I would ever be able to survive a marriage without it.

"A"

October 1994.

### Description from M

Describing how one sees a relationship is rather difficult.

Let me start by saying that I have never had a more secure feeling since I have been with "A". She is not only my partner, she is my lover, my best friend, playmate and someone who really shares my burdens.

Often when one is ill, their partner does not have very much time and patience dealing with this, either having to work or having social arrangements. "A" becomes my nurse and doctor. By this I mean that she really looks after me.

As I was a sales rep I had to support my customers. I had to travel considerably. My travels took me to Zimbabwe, Swaziland, Botswana and even to the Cape. This means that I was often away from home for long periods. I have never had a bad feeling about leaving "A" alone or even feeling jealous. I know she feels the same about me. This I feel is due to being honest with each other. I do flirt as does "A" as does everyone. My flirting will not be any different if we are together or apart, but this is as far as it goes.

I am a slightly "selfish" person when it comes to being "talkative". Instead of sitting in the lounge talking or discussing things, I will read a newspaper or magazine. I know she gets cross with me yet I do it. The reason I mention this is to tell you that I have a few bad character flaws. "A" normally discusses this with me. I can go on about how wonderful a person "A" is. But this is not about her. I really have a nice person to share my life with.

We have our differences, different tastes in movies, books, food etc, but we compromise. I feel that this is also a concrete factor in a good relationship.

Basically how I see my relationship with "A".

I would like to spend the rest of my life with her. She has a wonderful mother who is also a friend not only a "mother in law" (she lives close by). I mention this because my previous mother in law interfered terribly with my marriage.

"A" has never been married.

I obviously have.

My parents are still married.

"A's" parents are divorced+/- 13 years.

Age: "A" = 26.

I am 38.

My command of the English language is not very good. So this is all I am going to put on paper.

"M"

October 1994.

## WRITTEN DESCRIPTIONS FROM COUPLE 2

### Description from N

When I met A I was extremely cynical about men and relationships, despite the fact that I was only 18 years old. I was a rabid feminist and absolutely determined that no man would ever take advantage of me. These feelings had two sources: the first was my previous relationships (one in particular, in which my best friend had seduced my boyfriend, obviously with his co-operation!); and the second (most important source) was my parent's relationship. Actually, there was a third, even more important source: my relationship with my father.

I don't think my parents had ever had a good relationship, although I think they may have loved each other right at the beginning. My mother always loved my father, but my father did not always love my mother (at least as far as I could tell). My parents got married when my mother was 17 and my father was 21 because my mother was pregnant and came from a Catholic family. I was born just after my mother turned 18 and just before my father turned 22. Perhaps they were happy during the first two or three years - this seems likely in fact. However, my father was unfaithful to my mother soon after the birth of my brother ( who is 4 1/2 years younger than me).

According to my mother he was unfaithful later in the marriage as well. I think my father didn't want any more children, but I'm not altogether sure of this. In any case, we were an extremely close knit family, undoubtedly overenmeshed. I know that my father loved us very much and was generally quite generous, protective and compassionate. I think that we were, to a degree, extensions of my father. He was an extremely dominant person and definitely head of the household. He had high expectations of his children - my brother and I were a source of pride to him (most of the time, anyway) and anything other than high academic achievement was unthinkable.

Physical appearance was highly valued in our family, particularly by my father, who comes from a family of exceptional appearance and athletic ability and since my brother and I were both intelligent and attractive there were few problems, at least until I reached adolescence. (My brother's rebellion began earlier - he was always naughty and rebellious, but then my father had been as well when he was younger and there was a clear distinction in our family between men and women. My father was (and still is) a very attractive and charismatic man who is well-liked and can be quite

charming and funny - all of my girlfriends at school and university liked him and people who didn't know who he was often assumed he was my boyfriend. He still looks a good ten to fifteen years younger than he is, and behaves like someone of a younger generation. I was very close to my father and in many ways we were quite similar. Neither of us liked to back down, which led to conflict when I reached adolescence and attempted to create an independent identity. My father liked being in control, and was extremely authoritarian while we were growing up. There were a number of contradictions inherent in my father's behaviour and attitudes, particularly regarding me. On the one hand, my father was sexist in many respects: there were certain things that men simply didn't do. He seemed incapable of boiling water or performing any other domestic chore apart from taking out the garbage. Despite the fact that my mother had a full-time job, she did all the cooking and laundry, and when we didn't have a domestic servant (which was often - my mother is American and was not brought up with servants) my mother and I (but not my brother) were expected to perform the other household chores. My mother hated housework and performed it with a martyred air, while I just hated it. I swore that I would never allow a man to force me into such a role and therefore refused to learn how to cook and strove to achieve the lowest possible mark for "Housecraft" which was compulsory in Form 1 and 2.

My father was sexist in another respect as well: he was hypercritical of the physical appearance of even the most beautiful women. When we lived in America my father was an avid reader of Playboy magazine, and to this day I cannot stand magazines which are exploitative of women.

I got the impression that my mother's figure didn't quite make the grade, even though she was slim and beautiful. Her figure wasn't perfect, but I think she had to work very hard at watching her diet. I know that just after my brother was born she was extremely slim - she looked like a fashion model. On the other hand, my father expected me to achieve academically and to have a career in commerce - I had to do Maths and Science (as opposed to Art). According to my father he did not discriminate against women in the workplace, and as far as I can tell, he didn't (in obvious contrast to his view of domestic roles within the family, which had a functional value for him). He also expected me to be his beautiful, feminine daughter (this included being a 'nice person') but at the same time I was expected to compete in the 'male' arena. He bought me two motorbikes: and offroad "srambler" when I was a young tomboy and then when I was 16 a small bike to ride to school, etc. in

order to give me some 'independence' according to my father. However, this 'independence' did not include the freedom to make my own decisions regarding my schoolwork or social life, particularly when it came to the opposite sex.

My father became downright Victorian when I reached adolescence and was hostile towards my boyfriends. I had restrictions placed on my social life which were stricter than those placed on many of my friends, and I resented this terribly. My father was also angry when my academic results deteriorated (before Form 2 I had never received less than a A for Maths, for example). I felt stifled by the petty discipline and restrictions of my all-girl high school and my father. I also wanted to fit in socially and be allowed the freedom that most of my friends had. I felt a bit insecure during adolescence, partly because I was not stick-thin and partly because most of my friends had more conventional parents than I did, lived in much smarter houses and spent more money on clothes. I also felt that unreasonable demands were being placed on me. In retrospect, I would say that I did not feel as though I were receiving unconditional love and approval, and generally I still feel as though these things are conditional on my being a certain kind of person. Oddly enough, my mother never placed these demands on me or punished me (except perhaps the occasional smack as a child) but this did not seem to compensate for the conditional approval I received from my father since he was the one with the power and authority. Whenever I stood up to him we had terrible fights and he couldn't tolerate it when I disagreed with him. I found his anger terrifying and he could reduce me to tears in a very short period of time. He didn't physically punish me so it was purely his verbal anger that I feared, as well as being 'gated'. He demanded to be listened to but didn't listen to what I was saying. It also seems to me that my mother didn't stand up to him. I hated the way that her overtures towards my father were rejected - for example, if she tried to give him a hug he either wouldn't reciprocate or would be very awkward about it. They were not physically affectionate towards each other, although I think my mother would have liked to have been. Ironically, my father did not treat my mother with the respect she deserved, yet would become extremely angry if my brother or I were disrespectful towards her. My mother was, and is, cynical about men and people in positions of authority, yet does not believe that women should be ordained as priests in the Catholic Church (she has gone back to the Church since her divorce).



My father is opposed to religion in the orthodox, traditional sense, yet is spiritual in some respects. My father did not convert to Catholicism when he married my mother (although he did make an initial attempt to do so) and my brother and I were not brought up with any religion. I gather that my mother was not altogether too happy about this arrangement. Ironically, my mother with her Catholic upbringing allowed me to go on the Pill when I was 17 and had a steady boyfriend, and my father had a fit because he was not consulted. Perhaps this had something to do with the fact that he didn't like my boyfriend, whom he considered to be a 'wimp'. My mother, however, got on very well with him and my other boyfriends.

My relationship with my husband has developed in large part as a response to my dissatisfaction with my parents' marriage. I decided that if I ever got married I would have to be sure that it was the right person because I was determined not to be trapped in a marriage like that of my parents.

I think that I was extremely lucky to meet A particularly at the time I did because I was disillusioned with relationships, and he was exactly the right antidote - he is an exceptional person and embodies many of the qualities which I value and admire, plus I found him madly attractive from the very moment I set eyes on him. In some ways we are very similar and in others, complete opposites. It makes life interesting but it can also cause conflict (which, incidentally, highlights one of our main differences - he actively seeks it, I avoid it assiduously). I have always found conflict extremely stressful and upsetting, particularly since it was something which was never openly acknowledged or discussed when I lived with my parents, and when there was conflict between my father and I he would get extremely angry. I still find it stressful, but I try very hard to conduct an argument with my husband in a reasonable manner without getting too stressed out.

My husband loves a good argument, and loves playing devil's advocate in order to stimulate debate. We are very well matched intellectually and have a similar world view so we don't generally disagree on matters of religion, morality, politics, etc. but we enjoy debates and discussions of an intellectual nature (particularly when it comes to literature or philosophy). We both love reading a wide variety of books and I think our compatibility on an intellectual level and our capacity to provide each other with intellectual stimulation is one of the most important components of our marriage. Also, we laugh a lot together. We are committed to making our marriage work, and sometimes this is not easy. However, we have a strong bond and

provide each other with emotional support, and my husband has given me unconditional love and support, something which is obviously important to me. I know of no-one else who would have put up with some of my eccentricities - I am not the easiest person to live with and I am extremely demanding and often inflexible. When we do experience conflict, it is inevitably tied to my difficulties regarding 'male' and 'female' roles - in the past I have been torn between conflicting demands and have felt pressurised to fulfil both 'male' and 'female' roles perfectly, and have alternated between conforming and rebelling in a somewhat adolescent fashion (for example when I have been employed, I have been ambitious and driven, but I have also spent a great deal of time not being employed and indulging my intellectual urges by reading fifteen books at the same time and writing fiction (unpublished) for fun. It goes without saying that I have always refused to be a 'housewife' and fulfil the traditional 'female' role despite not being employed). I am currently doing my second Honours degree through UNISA, so I do feel as though I am achieving something. No doubt my husband finds my lifestyle trying at times, as do I myself, since we both believe that women should be independent. I do have a troublesome streak of dependence and passivity which I struggle to overcome. I cannot wait to qualify since I have come to agree with Frankl that satisfaction and pleasure are by-products of purposeful activity rather than being goals in themselves. I have had the luxury of finding out that I am not cut out for a life of leisure! Another thing which my husband finds trying and about which he has been patient is the manner in which I use my weight as a feminist statement - I am currently slightly overweight because I refuse to conform to the cultural ideal of thinness imposed on women's bodies by the media - I am a Naomi Wolf fan. I have extremely healthy eating habits and do not overeat, and I refuse to permanently deprive my body of nutrition in order to maintain an unnaturally thin shape (when I was in my early and mid 20's I was very thin, which does not come naturally to me and required constant deprivation). I realise that this is the re-enactment of an adolescent rebellion against my father and have recently come to realise that having a reasonably attractive figure is not necessarily the symptom of oppression (provided it is achieved by healthy means and not starvation!) For this reason, I have also begun exercising, another thing which I have not been particularly fond of, perhaps because my father values physical fitness, perhaps as a result of an ingrained passivity (created by my upbringing) which tends to make it difficult to be proactive, aggressive and an energetic 'initiator' in both a

figurative sense and a literal, physical sense. My husband is also a firm believer in physical fitness, so it is easy to see the recreation of an earlier conflict here! I am a firm believer in the individual's power to change - self-improvement is a permanent, ongoing process in my life since I believe that I bear full responsibility for my behaviour and my choices in life and that I am not a mere victim of my upbringing or socialisation. I realise how my upbringing has contributed to my personality traits and attitudes, and I am aware (most of the time) of the way in which certain conflicts with my father are re-enacted in my marriage. However, if I remain passive and allow a less than ideal situation to continue or if I persist in maintaining attitudes which inhibit my growth as a person then it is entirely my own fault. I believe that this approach is absolutely crucial in nurturing a relationship, and I believe that my marriage would not survive without it. (A good illustration is my effort to confront conflict, rather than avoid it as I learnt to do with my father). My parents did not fight openly, and problems in the family were avoided and denied. This is lethal in a relationship but luckily I am aware of my tendency to avoid conflict and luckily my husband often forces confrontation. Obviously there is still a disparity between the amount of confrontation each of us is comfortable with (he prefers more, I prefer less than we actually engage in) but compromise is the essence of a successful marriage. However, this does not mean that every decision should be a compromise i.e. finding a middle ground - sometimes one alternative is superior to the other, and sometimes there are things about which one feels strongly and is not prepared to compromise. Sometimes we agree to disagree and leave it at that. If we agreed on everything and shared exactly the same opinions and eventually merged into one being, then we would lose our individual identities and everything that makes our relationship interesting and stimulating. Mutual respect for sometimes 'odd' opinions is very important. I think the reasons that we fit together so well can be explained quite effectively from a Jungian perspective: both the anima and the animus are strongly developed in both of us. Without spending several pages exploring this in depth, a simple explanation which takes our parents' marriages into account could be that my husband's parents had the inverse roles of my parents. My husband's father is a gentle, caring, almost 'maternal' parent in his treatment of his children who gave them their love of reading, and his mother is a very strong, independent, energetic, attractive person involved in a variety of activities who excels in sport and is exceptionally fit and strong. The similarity between his mother and my father,

and between his father and my mother, is obvious. Add to this the fact that I identified much more with my father than with my mother, and you get a very interesting relationship between our animas and animuses (animi? ha, ha!). My husband is a very kind, generous and loving person but is also critical and demanding (I could be describing myself!), although he is actually a more generous person than I am.

I think that he is also a 'better' person than me in some ways and I admire his achievements and approach to life. I think that he has provided me with a role model which compensates for some of the deficiencies of the one with which I grew up. I also think that I am a better person for having known him. I love him very much and respect him tremendously. I know that he believes that 'love' is a difficult thing to define and that its nature changes over time so it is not the single most important thing in a marriage, but I believe that it is the love or affection or whatever you want to label it that provides the motivation for staying together. What's the point of working at a relationship or striving for a successful marriage unless you value the person highly and want to be with them above everyone else? Obviously love is not sufficient to maintain a marriage, but for me it is necessary. Another necessary, or rather absolutely crucial, component is trust. My parents' divorce was eventually precipitated by my father's affair with a younger woman when I was in my 20's. She wasn't a lot older than I was. In addition to this my best friend at school, whose greatest joy in life consisted of seducing each one of her best friends' boyfriends, succeeded quite effectively with my boyfriend who didn't seem to offer much resistance. My trust in people was not great, but A worked very hard for a long time at the beginning of our relationship to prove that I could trust him, since he understood that I needed this. Another stark contrast with my parents' relationship is the degree of physical affection that my husband and I have always shared (obviously it's not quite the same now as it was eleven years ago, but it's still there). Holding hands, hugging, etc. is something we enjoy (and in fact we were permanently 'attached' to each other when we were younger). He has a higher sex drive than I have, and while it is normal for there to be a disparity in most couples, I think that I need to become more physical, release the inner child, become more uninhibited; in other words, live more on the physical plane and less on the intellectual one, be more playful and less analytical. I also think that we should both become more spiritual, but not in a formal, religious sense since neither of us subscribes to orthodox religion of any description (he's a non-religious Jew and I'm a non-religious non-Catholic person of mixed religious

roots). I think we would both enjoy exploring spirituality of a more philosophical, informal kind, where one becomes aware of the Spiritus Mundi and one's connectedness to all people, past and present (if that doesn't sound too 'New Agey' and Californian!). I can really appreciate Jung's idea of the collective unconscious becoming more important than the personal (but I digress!).

My husband would like our children, should we decide to have any, to be Jewish because he feels that tradition is important, even if he doesn't believe in God (although he has an open mind about it). I agree that tradition is good for children because it gives them roots and a strong sense of identity, but I don't feel strongly about religion myself. I think that children should be exposed to religion (but not brainwashed) and if they choose to practise it, that's fine, and if they choose to reject it, that's also fine. The best thing about a Jewish upbringing is that it teaches you to question things rather than accept them blindly: all sorts of philosophical propositions are discussed by children in the classes they attend in preparation for their barmitzvahs/badmitzvahs. This is in large part responsible for my husband's enjoyment of philosophical debate (although it is also something he learned to enjoy from his father). I miss not having had a religion as a child, although now I actually feel quite happy about it. Neither my parents nor my husband's parents have a problem with our marrying someone of another faith: My parents did it, and my husband's parents are not religious people.

### Description from A

An analysis of my relationship with my spouse with particular reference to the effect of my parent's marriage and divorce.

I am 32 years old. I have been married for 3 years. Prior to getting married my spouse and I cohabited for about 7 years. My parents were married for about 18 years, they were divorced when I was 16 years old.

Please note: This document has been prepared as a spontaneous response to the topic with little regard for structure, coherence or grammar. If there are any inconsistencies or contradictions it is probably because I have differing views on different matters in different contexts.

I would characterise my marriage as very good. My relationship with my wife is one of trust and mutual respect. We have many disagreements on fairly important issues but conflicts are generally resolved within a fairly short time (a few hours at most).

My parents had a poor relationship for nearly all of the period which I can remember. They argued regularly and acrimoniously, the situation deteriorated gradually until it was obvious that they should get a divorce. There was no physical violence involved in their arguments and the children (I have an older sister and younger brother) were never involved in the arguments or asked to 'take sides' - except to a limited extent right at the end of the marriage during divorce proceedings when my parents may have been afraid of losing contact with one or more children.

In my family, hostility and aggression are openly displayed. If someone had something to say at the dinner table it was said and discussed and often argued over by all members of the family. Disagreements were common and we felt quite comfortable arguing violently over a point and then forgetting about it later. I believe that I benefited from this situation in the following way:

I was always aware of the nature of my parents' relationship and what the issues were that divided them. My siblings and I were not shocked or surprised by the divorce, in fact we encouraged the process once the decision had been tentatively reached. In my opinion this is better than a situation where the conflicts in the family are hidden until they manifest themselves in some sort of cathartic explosion. This constant exposure to and participation in conflict has prepared me for life in the business world and the real world of relationships. I have learned that conflict is not bad but that it is a natural part of a family's life and it is worse to suppress resentment or disagreement than to express it and try to resolve the issue.

I do not see my parents' divorce as a failure, but simply as a natural consequence of the path that their relationship took. If couples communicate correctly and candidly then they have every chance of building on common principles - if my parents had not communicated so openly with each other and their children, there would have been resentment on my part because I

would have felt that I was excluded from something important and the eventual divorce may have come as a great psychological shock.

I believe that my marriage has benefited from the example of a marriage that did not last. My wife and I took a long time (7 years +) to decide to get married and lived together virtually as husband and wife for most of the period. This cautious approach prevented us from making a decision too early.

I also believe that my acceptance of conflict as a natural part of a relationship has helped to keep the marriage stable because I see an argument as a healthy and necessary means of communication rather than a reason to get divorced. I feel that my wife is less ready to accept conflict and actively avoids arguments on fundamental issues - I believe this is ultimately unhealthy and I occasionally provoke her in order to make her 'stand up and fight' because I believe that harbouring resentment is much more dangerous than expressing it.

Throughout my parents' marriage and subsequent divorce they always put their children first. I always knew (and still know) that my parents love and respect me and that I have unconditional support from them. I think that when/if I have children I will carry this lesson with me. My parent's experience has shown me that bringing up children has nothing to do with how much in love the parents are with each other but how important the children are. In fact, I have sometimes thought that if my parents had neglected their children in favour of their own relationship they may have salvaged it but they would never have done so. At all times their conflicts were suspended and they worked together when one of their children needed attention.

My parents' divorce when I was 16 also made me more independent (I chose to live with my father, not my mother. The main reason for the choice was that my father stayed in our original house and I chose not to move to a new area). I was given the choice of where to live and no parental restrictions were placed on me. This enabled me to develop greater maturity than some of my peers from more 'stable' homes. I was also able to relate to my parents as fellow adults after the divorce rather than a parent-child

relationship. This also helped to develop some of the independence and maturity which is so necessary in a marriage.

My parents' relationship also taught me that the key to keeping a relationship alive is mutual respect and commitment to each other and the relationship. Most people (including my parents) love each other when they get married but 'love' alone is a bad reason to get married. I have learned that keeping a relationship healthy takes hard work on the part of both parties and to rely on love and sexual attraction is virtually useless.

I have also learned that communication is important. If you communicate openly then you can see areas of conflict more quickly and act to resolve them if you want to. If the marriage then breaks down it can at least do so in a controlled and rational manner. After what I have experienced I do not believe that any marriage is 'bullet proof' and that unless 100% commitment is forthcoming from both marriage partners the marriage can easily break down.

After my parents' marriage broke up I saw how difficult it was for both parents to adjust to their newly independent lifestyle. Paradoxically, I now think that a good way to keep a marriage healthy is to keep preparing for the day when you no longer have a spouse. If two people keep full and stimulating independent lives then it allows them room to express themselves outside the marriage and allows room for expressing creative urges and frustrations outside of the marriage when the marriage is too brittle. For this reason I have actively encouraged my wife to seek activities/employment outside of the marriage and I try to do the same.